DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 070 335 FL 003 611

TITLE	Teaching Modern Languages Across the Ability Range: CILT Reports and Papers 8.
INSTITUTION	Centre for Information on Language Teaching, London (England).
PUB DATE	Sep 72
NOTE	81p.; Papers from a conference held at State House, High Holborn, London, England, March 27-28, 1972
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Conference Reports; *Curriculum Development; *Elementary Schools; *Fles; French; Instructional Program Divisions; *Language Instruction; Language Programs; Student Interests; Student Needs; Tea her Supply and Demand
IDENTIFIERS	*England

ABSTRACT

Papers compiled in this report from a conference on teaching a foreign language (usually French) to all primary school pupils in England reflects the national effort to extend language instruction in the comprehensive school programs now under development. The papers raise fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of the general curriculum and the methcdology of language teaching. Problems related to the availability of trained teachers, the provision of equipment, and the development of course materials to suit pupils of varying ability are also examined. Resource materials and a list of participants are included. (RL)

CILT Reports and Papers 8

Teaching modern languages across the ability range

ED 07[illegible]

FL 003 611

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

September, 1972
Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research

1

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPY RIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Center for Information on Language Teaching and Research
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

Published by the
Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research
State House
63 High Holborn
London WC1R 4TN

© Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research 1972

Printed by H[illegible] Tomsett & Co. Ltd.,
Warner H[illegible]er Street, London EC1R 5ES.

ISBN 0 903466 00 7

Price 65p., post free in the United Kingdom.

CILT Reports and Papers 8

ED 070335

Teaching modern languages across the ability range

Papers from a conference on

Teaching a foreign language to all pupils and across the ability range

held at State House, High Holborn, London, on 27th and 28th March 1972

FL003 611

Foreword

The following papers arose from a conference convened by CILT from 27 to 28 March 1972. Appendices 1 and 2 consist of two post-conference contributions by participants.

The subject is one which deeply concerns language teachers today, since extending foreign language teaching to the whole school population raises questions not only about the nature and purpose of the general curriculum and the methodology of language teaching, but about the supply and training of specialist teachers, the provision of equipment and the development of new course materials to suit varying abilities.

The conference was intended to provide opportunities for discussion by those directly involved in the present context of educational development and reorganisation. Inevitably there was not time to deal with all aspects: among those which received comparatively little attention were tests and examinations, the relationship between teaching the foreign language and teaching the mother tongue and the varying claims of different foreign languages. For practical reasons the conference was mostly about teaching French in the first years of the secondary school, with the contingent problem of mixed ability classes.

The chairman throughout the conference was Professor A. Spicer, to whom the thanks of all participants are due, not only for his effective and impartial direction, but for producing the admirably clear summary and conclusions printed on pp. 66-8.

The intention was to provoke further discussion and experiment. If many questions remain unanswered, at least they have been asked. It is hoped that readers will find the following pages stimulating rather than sedative.

G. E. Perren

Director,
Centre for Information on
Language Teaching and Research

August 1972

2/3

Contents

			page
1.	Introductory paper	G. E. Perren	7
2.	Teaching modern languages across the ability range	E. W. Hawkins	12
3.	A foreign language for all?	A. W. Hornsey	32
4.	A plea for realism in teaching slow learners	M. V. Salter	37
5.	French across the ability range in London	S. M. Stoker	43
6.	Methods and materials	E. R. Ellard	48
7.	Teaching a foreign language in the primary school	F. L. Penty	57
8.	Modern languages in a comprehensive school	Dame Margaret Miles	62
9.	Summary of discussions and general conclusions	A. Spicer	66
Appendix 1 :	A note on language skills	C. V. James	69
Appendix 2 :	Modern languages : a basic part of the curriculum	G. Varnava	71
Appendix 3 :	Current research		74
Appendix 4 :	Select bibliography		79
Appendix 5 :	List of participants		81

4/5

— 1 —

Introductory paper

G. E. PERREN

British educational theory is notably sensitive to conflicts arising between the needs of the individual and the claims of the community. Often we resolve the intellectual dilemma by insisting that man can fulfil himself only as a fully participating member of society, and education should therefore aim to make him one. In practice this means providing a wide range of choices, if not of types of school, then of planned curricula or of individual subjects. Schools are expected to provide for the maximum variety of personal development—teaching according to the individual pupil's needs and capacity—but at the same time they are exhorted to avoid segregation by ability, aptitude or sex, because this might prejudice desirable social values which are more important than classroom convenience.

All this is fine when applied to such abstractions as the 'curriculum' or the 'school system', when in fact we are not directly concerned with teaching anything in particular. It is a much more complex problem to a head of department faced by a highly miscellaneous intake of pupils who are all expected to 'learn' French or German or Spanish within the same general allocation of time. Although we can identify the teacher's task by calling it teaching across the ability range, we do not thereby provide him with the means of doing it successfully.

In this situation the past history of modern language teaching in Britain contributes little guidance or encouragement. Not only philologically but pedagogically the classics begat modern languages. If Latin and Greek were gentlemen's subjects in the nineteenth century, French and German became their middle class successors in the twentieth—with Italian perhaps for the girls. More recently an official report gave Russian a special meritocratic status, which has been only partly justified.

It is somewhat confusing to lump together all modern languages, as is usual for purposes of discussing their place in the curriculum. The status, incentive for learning and educational or vocational value of each are not the same. Moreover, although from time to time decisions are taken about who should learn which language in schools on the grounds that some are

'easier' than others, it is difficult to see how this can be justified, except in terms of the course materials used or of immediate teaching objectives. Examining boards assume that the 'O' or 'A' level weights of all foreign languages are the same, and may even go to some lengths to prove it.

The progressive democratisation of British education in recent years has not merely made it obligatory to offer all subjects to all who can possibly benefit from them, but often has led us to present them in a form not yet fully adjusted to the needs of the majority. There has never been much argument about a subject like mathematics—it was assumed that everyone should learn it, although some would obviously get further than others. Mathematics has never acquired the touch of cultural exclusiveness carried by a foreign language. Nor, some would say, does it present anything like the same practical problems of selection, grading, practice and classroom organisation. Today 'mathematics for the majority' would sound trite; a 'modern language for the majority' still challenges discussion, less perhaps on theoretical than on purely practical grounds. Probably we really mean French for the majority, for it is difficult to see how, on any appreciable scale, any other language could now get itself established as the first (and only) foreign language learned by the majority.

The arguments for teaching at least one modern language to all pupils are varied and persuasive. Politically, the Council of Europe resolution of 1969—'only if the study of modern languages becomes general will mutual understanding and co-operation be possible in Europe' — with its corollary that all children should have the opportunity to learn a modern language, makes sense to Britain in 1972. Educationally, it is claimed that 'the learning of a new language may give confidence to the pupils who need it most: the less than average, those who find difficulty with English'. Socially, what was formerly deemed good for the select minority, must needs be assumed good for the majority. Culturally, a modern language is necessary to make us good Europeans; vocationally it ought to be useful to us.

Such arguments can, no doubt, be questioned. Mutual understanding and co-operation (in the political sense) is more likely to arise from the work of a limited number of public servants, functionaries or leaders than from the whole school population of Europe learning a variety of different languages at their own levels. It might be claimed that one designated second language for all Europe would improve co-operation better than a variety of choices. (If English, French or German arouse jealousies, one could argue Latin for the intelligentsia or Esperanto for tourism.) As for starting a foreign language to compensate for poor progress in English—why not improve the English teaching first? What was found right for highly selected pupils is unlikely to be equally good for the unselected (unless the selection *or* the material was wrong). And culturally, wide reading in translation from several languages might well be more beneficial than the limited understanding of a few original texts in one—and so on.

Educational and vocational values often get confused and attitudes

oscillate like a galvanometer in a thunderstorm. Irrespective of the actual linguistic performance of pupils, we often justify several years of classroom toil by assumed educational or cultural values, perceptible only to the eye of faith. It is far less easy to justify the vocational value of learning a language if the pupils never get to the stage of speaking, reading or writing it to any very useful degree. Yet if there has been any significant change in professional views during recent years, it is in the weight now given to active performance: the trouble is that while we rate ability to speak and read a language more highly than before, our cherished and established criteria of success—the examinations—have not yet provided usefully graduated measuring scales. They tend to perpetuate former notions of absolute pass or fail. And with unselected pupils, a simple pass or fail line will hardly do. Multiple teaching to all and sundry demands multiple criteria of success.

Be that as it may, the decision to offer a modern language to all seems to have happened. If it has been consciously taken, it is difficult to see where or by whom. There could be no directive to LEAs from Curzon Street, and even the Schools Council, while providing massive support for languages, hardly issues fiats about who should learn them. Most probably LEAs have taken the decision somewhere along the administrative chain, less often the heads of schools, least of all the language teacher.

The tradition of training behind modern language teachers has tended to maintain the idea that foreign languages were special subjects for the few, as indeed they were for them when they were at school. The development of the language laboratory during the sixties (with its train of packaged software, tending to limit the teacher's own initiative) opened vistas of wider teaching to more pupils, albeit by lock-step methods. If new techniques and new theories of 'how language works' or applied linguistics made the subject more exciting, they did not materially change the objectives. In recent years then, we seem to have amassed a grand array of technical means without questioning very closely the ends which they should serve. And the ends and aims need questioning, for the belief that all should try to learn a language may bring in its turn the assumption (although it is by no means a necessary condition) that they should be taught in unstreamed or mixed-ability groups. At present language laboratories are even less adaptable than teachers to such a task.

The situation can be illustrated by the fact that in one large authority forty to fifty per cent of secondary schools are alleged to be non-streamed. Suspicions that this has resulted from socio-political rather than educational decisions are sometimes reinforced by examples of the timetable provision made for modern languages. Five periods in two days of 2 and 2+1 is an extreme case. Teachers of languages are clearly worried. A recent letter from a teacher puts the position thus:

> 'At the moment my school is giving very serious consideration to going over to completely mixed ability teaching groups . . . My colleagues and I in the language department would like to give our support to such a measure, which has very obvious advantages *socially* but we

cannot honestly see how we could teach a modern language effectively to a group containing pupils from the whole range of ability. Class teaching would obviously not work . . . and individualised self-instruction would require a vast amount of very expensive equipment quite beyond the means of any school . . .'

Some clear thinking seems necessary. If we are agreed that a modern language should be learned by the majority, then we also need to redefine what we mean by learning a modern language. Clearly the aims, content and techniques derived from past experience with a selected minority will not do. A careful look at the relevance of some traditional skills has been taken. Translation and prose are now commonly rejected in theory if not in practice. But a satisfactory definition of different, yet appropriate, levels of achievement for those of varying ability has yet to be made. Each level needs its own useful surrender value, and determining exactly what these shall be calls for a great deal of careful experiment in many schools by many teachers. At present there is no useful consensus of views.

We tend to think (or plead) that all standards of achievement should be expressed in terms of examination syllabuses. But when this is attempted, as by some CSE Boards, the result is rather like the Cheshire cat: the grin remains while the substance dissolves. At the crucial pass/fail level we seldom find definitions of what must be known by pupils; only generalised descriptions of socio-linguistic behaviour: 'Pupils should be able to react correctly to greetings and short everyday utterances'. Can they always react 'correctly' to the same situation in English?

One may ask what research is doing. It cannot do very much without new criteria of performance. Often research into the problems of the slow learner is based on studying his ability to cope with materials originally designed for the high-flyer. This seems to beg our question, for we really want to know how best to teach material we know he *can* learn — not how to make the best of a bad job. It is not a question of studying under-achievement but of first deciding what appropriate achievements should be.

It should perhaps not be overlooked that while we have often condemned teaching *about* the foreign language, and in its place insisted on learning to *use* it, we are today increasingly concerned with teaching about the foreign people who speak it and their customs. It would be nice to think that civilisation has thus displaced grammar in the syllabus. But it is no accident that both can be studied quite independently of actually learning to speak a language, even with some benefit. Perhaps the educational, cultural and social values ascribed to modern languages can be implanted through some sort of European studies syllabus, with only as much language learning in it as pupils can take or teachers give. At least one LEA aims to do this and has written its own French language course for the purpose. But we must be honest about it: although such a plan may well provide useful pre-conditions for later intensive language learning by those who want it, it will not mean that every pupil will speak or understand very much French unless he is regularly exported to

France for the holidays. This sort of realism is not a cloak for cynicism or a disguised plea for a reversion to élitist language teaching. Quite the opposite: it is a plea for setting up new and realistic standards of achievement, not derived from the ghostly presence of past 'O' level papers, but based on what can be done within the resources available. It would indeed be cynicism to put modern languages in the curriculum for all as a mere gesture, without specifying realistic goals, without providing sufficient room on the timetable, and without providing teachers with the equipment, training and opportunity to teach smaller groups within a flexible syllabus.

The French Pilot Scheme has shown that, irrespective of some notions of ability, educationally useful results can be achieved by energy and enthusiasm. Tradition did not get in the way in the primary schools because there wasn't any. Equally there is evidence that without enthusiasm (or without a suitably literate home environment as support) not much of use may be achieved. Undoubtedly there are numbers of teachers making a success of teaching mixed ability groups in secondary schools: we need to know a great deal more about their experience and exactly what they are achieving just as we are now discovering what is being achieved in primary schools. When we do, we shall probably wish to make a few adjustments to our training specifications for new teachers as well as to our notions of a foreign language syllabus.

A final point: 'a modern language' usually means French, and for the majority it will have to be French. But the appeal of other languages is strong and it would be a pity if their claims to be equally adaptable to the needs of the majority were completely overlooked. But they too will have to overhaul their syllabuses, offer their wares in the comprehensive supermarket, and persuade parents as well as children that they have value at a competitive price.

— 2 —

Teaching modern languages across the ability range

E. W. HAWKINS

During the sixties the teaching of French expanded in two directions. There was expansion vertically down the age range as more and more primary school pupils began French at eight plus or nine plus rather than eleven plus, which had been the traditional age of starting within the state system. Since most primary schools have a 'comprehensive' intake this entailed teaching French across the whole ability range. The Pilot Scheme in fact made it a condition that pupils offered French should not be selected by ability. As soon as the early 'comprehensive' cohorts of such pupils reached the secondary stage the question had to be faced by secondary teachers: shall a modern language be taught to the lower ability pupils whose curriculum previously did not include a language? The issue would in any case have been raised, regardless of the pilot experiment, as selective secondary education gave way to a comprehensive system, since it is not apparent how 'language streams' could be selected from a comprehensive intake by any criteria that would satisfy the pupils and their parents.

The coincidence of this vertical and horizontal expansion has, among other effects, resulted in a critical shortage of teachers of French. Less obviously but perhaps more seriously, it has revealed a shortage of teachers equipped to teach the less able pupils and of teaching materials adapted to their needs. So long as the less able child was in his primary unstreamed class, sitting beside his verbally lively neighbour, and so long as the work was largely oral, things went well. Once the able pace-makers in the class were streamed off at eleven plus and when the stage of *reading* and *writing* the foreign language was reached, the problems of lower ability pupils became all too obvious. The question is inevitably raised — what's the use of persevering? It is to this question that this paper is directed. We have in fact a double question to try to answer about teaching a language to the less able. Why do it? And (if we decide to try) how should we do it? In the discussion that follows we take

'less able' to mean the less able two thirds of each age-group who in a tripartite system of secondary education are judged unsuitable for an academic, grammar school curriculum.

Why

'Language is a tool: the pupil who fails to learn it has wasted his time'

A possible but too facile rejoinder to the question 'Why include a foreign language in the curriculum for all pupils?' is 'Why not?' We do not hear suggestions that, for example, mathematics should only be taught to the most able pupils. Is the study of a modern language somehow different from the rest of the curriculum? Yes, say some critics. Their argument against offering a modern language to the less able is that the aim is to teach a skill. If the learner fails to acquire this skill, he has wasted his time, whereas even a little history (say) is better than none.

This argument seeks further support from a recent tendency towards audio-visual and laboratory courses which emphasise *use* of the language in the classroom rather than 'talking about the language'. It is argued that earlier (grammar/translation) methods at least left the learner with a residue of knowledge of how language works, even if the main object (communication in the language) was not achieved, whereas when 'talking about' the language gives way to 'talking the language' as a tool, there is nothing left for the pupils who fail to master the tool. We should note *en passant* that this point of view leaves wide open the possibility that with more effective methods fewer pupils might fail. But even if this were not so the case argued that there is 'nothing left' for those who fail is based on a double misapprehension.

Such an argument both underrates the danger of 'going half-way to' (say) history and misconceives the positive contribution of a foreign language properly taught. What in fact happens when you 'go half-way' to learning history? The damage done in English schools before 1945 by the teaching of history *à la Churchill*, in which the whole universe seemed to revolve around England as in a pre-Copernican heaven, will take generations to eradicate.

Nor is the danger limited to history. Has going 'half-way' to understanding science no dangers? Ask the teacher thoughtfully trying to discuss in R.E. lessons the mysteries of the human condition and the limitations that scientists themselves set to the techniques of experimental method. The effect of going 'half-way' in these subjects is not so starkly obvious as it is in a language.

The fact is that language teaching is unique in that there exists a model (the native speaker) against whom the pupil (and the teacher) can be measured. In no other subject is this the case, except partially in music or athletics. Even here any models used have learned their skill by the same road as the pupils.

Tests of 'failure', for example, in geography or mathematics are defined by the teachers of these subjects. This must be remembered when critics speak

of less able pupils trying but 'failing' to 'acquire the language tool'. How many less able pupils in the English literature classroom 'fail' in whatever was the aim of the course, or acquire a half-knowledge which will serve to distort their judgement throughout adult life? There is no 'native knowledge' as there is of French with which to make instant comparisons.

We should treat with caution arguments about relative 'failure' at school subjects. A great deal that is learned in secondary school is soon forgotten. It is often the journey that matters, the attitudes left by the experience. Before we examine the question whether this could be true of the 'journey' into a foreign language there is another argument we must look at which has far-reaching implications for curriculum planning.

'They can't read or write their own language'

These less able pupils, it is argued (quoting Bernstein) manifest in their own use of English the characteristics of the restricted home background, namely: restricted use of pronouns, restricted range of tenses and poor aural discrimination. It is precisely these aspects of language use that the language teacher has to insist on. Thus the language classroom calls for qualities which run counter to the habits of language which less able pupils bring with them to school. The subject requires that they reject the language of their homes. Although those who argue this way would deny it, this comes close to suggesting that language study is for the middle classes only. This would be a tragedy. The working class child, conscious of the low value placed by his own community on his background or his parents' occupation, has in the past often found in the study of a foreign 'neutral' culture a new dignity and acceptance.

But if the less able child is restricted in the flexibility of his handling of language and therefore inevitably in his ability to learn, to think, to express emotion, to form articulate notions of right and wrong (as the writings of M. M. Lewis and others have shown) ought we not to be asking how we can help him? Might the study of a foreign language properly undertaken be an important element in the education of such a pupil for precisely this reason? The whole issue is topical in view of the controversy sparked off by Jensen[1]. He identified certain learning strategies as being characteristically less well developed in children of lower socio-economic groups. He hypothesised a continuum of learning strategy at whose two extremes are two genotypically distinct basic processes, labelled Level I (ability to learn by association) and Level II (conceptual ability). Level I involves the neural registration and consolidation of stimulus inputs and the formation of associations. Level I ability is tapped mostly by tests such as digit memory, serial rote learning, selective trial-and-error learning with reinforcement (feedback) for correct responses etc. Level II abilities, on the other hand, involve self-initiated elaboration and transformation of the stimulus input before it eventuates in an overt response as in concept learning and problem solving. Jensen suggests that teachers might concentrate on learning by 'Level I' (or rote) methods if 'insightful' methods

[1] 'How much can we boost IQ and scholastic achievement?' *Harvard Educational Review*, January 1969.

are too difficult. If a child cannot show that he 'understands' the meaning of 1+1=2 in some abstract, verbal, cognitive sense, he is, in effect, not allowed to go on to learn 2+2=4. Jensen is convinced that all the basic scholastic skills can be learned by children with normal Level I learning ability, provided the instructional techniques do not make 'g' (i.e. Level II) the *sine qua non* of being able to learn. If Jensen is right then the whole recent tendency of modern primary education towards emphasising 'insightful' as opposed to 'rote' learning has worked to the disadvantage of the working-class child and in favour of the middle-class pupil.

Equal treatment or positive discrimination?

But even if Jensen is right in his diagnosis of the different learning strategies that children use, is his conclusion concerning school curriculum policy justified? The point is an important one and we must follow it a little further.

Jensen has developed his thesis in his paper 'Do schools cheat minority children?'[2]. The argument has been taken up in comments on this paper by Burt, Butcher, Eysenck, Nisbet and Vernon. Jensen restates his point even more specifically:

'The majority of children called "culturally disadvantaged" show little or no deficiency in Level I abilities' (e.g. tests of rote learning, paired-associate learning, and digit-span memory) 'but they are about one standard deviation below the general mean on tests of Level II ability' (conceptual thinking, and the like).'

Eysenck spells out the corollary :

'I have often pointed out that our school system is distorted to a quite absurd extent by what I call the "educational fallacy", namely, the fallacy that all school children are potential academics, destined for university, and that accordingly our whole educational system should be geared to the aim of producing potential university students . . . Muddled notions of equality are responsible for the unconscious cruelty which keeps unwilling children glued to their desks, working on tasks that do not interest them, heading for certain failure in the pursuit of irrelevant academic objectives.'[3]

But is this the conclusion that curriculum planners ought to draw? Nisbet puts a different view :

'The question here is whether the evidence of different types of thinking, associative and conceptual, provides a sound case for categorizing children by their dominant style of thinking and teaching different categories in different ways. Of course, equality of opportunity does not mean that all should be treated alike. We should adapt our teaching strategies to suit our pupils; but

[2] *Educational Research*, vol. 14, no. 1.
[3] *Educational Research*, vol. 14, no. 2.

are the two strategies suggested by Jensen the correct ones? Surely we want all pupils to undertake, eventually, conceptual thinking, and this will not be achieved simply by nurturing the capacity for associative thinking (though this may be a necessary preliminary step). Conceptual skills are developed by exercising them : so we should be asking our less able pupils not just to engage in rote learning *but to undertake activities which demand the exercise of those forms of conceptual thinking which we want to see developed — at however low a level. If a pupil is weak in an important skill, should he be excused from it, or given extra tuition in it?*[4]. *(My italics,* E.W.H.*).*

This is surely the only reasonable view for the educationalist to take. If one followed the line suggested by Jensen, why not go further? Mrs. Burstall's evidence shows that girls take to language learning more readily than boys across both class and age ranges. Is this a reason for confining language study to girls?

What we should be seeking much more positively is some way out of the viciously circular argument which says to the child : 'You have been found on reaching secondary school to be lacking in some verbal and conceptual abilities. Your deficiencies will inevitably make further progress in many school subjects (and not simply in learning a foreign language) quite difficult and set your teachers grave problems which in the old selective system they by-passed. We have therefore decided to cut from your programme an important part of the verbal education that you need even more than verbally able pupils.'

It is precisely because study of a foreign language is an indispensible element in any strategy for breaking out of this vicious circle that it should have a place in the curriculum of the less able pupil. What is the case for this?

Correcting the magical view of language

One irreplaceable contribution of study of a foreign language has been stated by Yuen Ren Chao[5] :

'Monolingual persons take language so much for granted that they often forget its arbitrary nature and cannot distinguish words from things. Thus, primitive peoples often believe that putting a curse on somebody's name could actually harm his person. Persons unused to foreign languages tend to find something perverse in the way foreigners talk. Even Oliver Goldsmith could not get over the perversity of the French, who would call a cabbage "shoe", instead of calling a cabbage "cabbage". The story is told of an English woman who always wondered why the French call water "de l'eau", the Italians call it "del acqua" and the Germans call it "das Wasser". "Only we English people," she said, "call it properly 'water'. We not only call it 'water', but it *is* water." '

[4] *Educational Research*, vol. 14, no. 2.
[5] *Language and symbolic systems.* CUP, 1968.

It will not do to dismiss this argument as trivial. Study of a foreign language compels pupils to compare concepts in simple but important ways. Properly conducted aural discrimination practice is a valuable way of arousing children's curiosity and critical awareness of the sounds they hear. Learning the sound system of a foreign language can, properly taught, in itself be a lesson in coming to terms with differences and with unusual experiences. Because it implies no criticism of the pupils' own speech, such comparisons as are made are neutral, emotionally, in a way that (say) discussion of dialect differences in class could never be. Again, even a quite elementary discussion of the problem of the 'untranslatability' of concepts like 'home' or the force of the difference between 'I eat' and 'I am eating' or, in the reverse direction, the precise meaning contained in the French *chez* or *on* compels pupils to examine how language works and how speech constrains the shape in which thoughts are cast.

Are we to exclude such elementary linguistic study from the curriculum? Is there not an important place in the whole curriculum for the study of 'language' as an aspect of human behaviour, including some study of language acquisition, both of L_1 and L_2? Ought school leavers not to be helped to provide rich verbal environments for the babies they will be responsible for within a few years of leaving school? In such a syllabus some study in depth of a foreign language would have an essential place as an element in language education even for pupils who might not be able to communicate much in the language.

If at the same time the study encourages well planned foreign travel, brings foreigners into the classroom regularly as no other subject does, encourages pupils to widen their repertoire of singable folksongs, and incidentally promotes pupils' curiosity about the linguistic history of words met everyday (café, menu, bus, battalion, platoon, curfew, etc.) in a way that enriches later experience and sows seeds of further questioning, then as Piaget said: 'The more a child has seen and heard, the more he wants to see and hear.'[6]

Hornsey[7] however questions whether language study by the less able one-third of each age group could ever enrich concept formation. He quotes Piaget to the effect that the less able pupil will be incapable of anything except concrete operational thinking until well after the normal age of eleven, and Vygotsky who found *the average* child to be about twelve before his concepts are adult. Some less able children, Hornsey argues, will never achieve adult concepts while at school. Burt disagrees:

'I do not doubt that the Swiss children tested by Piaget and Inhelder were unable to solve the problems cited until they reached the age of twelve; but the average Londoner can solve them at the age of seven. *And experimental studies have clearly demonstrated that children of normal intelligence*

[6] J. Piaget, *The origins of intelligence in children*. International Universities, New York, 1952. (Reprint of 1936 edn.)
[7] *Languages and the less able*. (Mimeograph, 1971.)

can readily be taught formal reasoning during the primary stage, provided the logical steps required are relatively few and simple, and the concepts and relations involved are such as they can easily grasp . . . Important as it is, however, *explicit* training in logical and critical thinking is apparently never attempted at the primary and seldom practised during the secondary stages."[8] *(My italics,* E.W.H.*).*

Hornsey's reference to Vygotsky assumes that the curriculum remains as it was for the children whom Vygotsky studied in Stalinist Russia in the twenties. But a visit to a modern English primary school might have startled Vygotsky (it would certainly have warmed the great young psychologist's heart).

We are only at the beginning of the study of the effect on concept formation of verbal education; the work of pioneers like Mrs. Pyrah of Castleford or Mrs. Gina Armstrong at the Educational Priority Area project in Dennaby suggests that the relationship between language experience and cognition will be an important growth point in education in the coming decade. It is further confirmed by the findings of experiments such as the Heber (Wisconsin) study in which the effects of daily one-to-one dialogue with an adult on young children's thought and attitudes were electrifying.[9]

Need to re-think the contribution of verbal education to the curriculum

The fact is that the whole content of the verbal element in the curriculum calls for re-examination.

The child from a socio-economically disadvantaged home suffers many handicaps — typically malnutrition, lack of healthy routine and sound sleep, disorganised time-keeping leading to missed schooling, lack of variety in early experience, etc. The greatest handicap of all however is deprivation of 'adult time', that is individual undisturbed dialogue with an adult which becomes the basis for Vygotsky's 'inner dialogue' of thought. The sensitive studies of M. M. Lewis[10] have shown how through the histories of children in large families where the mother is sick and inadequate or worn down by other cares, where the emotional link between mother or caring adult and child is broken by separation or illness, just as through the case histories of the congenitally deaf or the institutionalised child, there runs a common thread. It is lack of that unhurried personal dialogue with an adult which establishes concepts by means of a language code which serves (in Bruner's phrase) as 'the calculus of thought'.

This dialogue with a caring adult, personal and individual to the child and going at the child's own speed and following the child's own curiosity, is now seen to be the best foundation for later learning in school. The more child-centred the primary school becomes the more advantage is given to

[8] *Educational Research,* vol. 14, no. 2.
[9] c.f. Eysenck's comments in *Race, intelligence and education.* Temple Smith, 1971.
[10] M. M. Lewis, *Language, thought and personality in infancy and childhood.* Harrap, 1963.

children whose early pre-school experience has accustomed them to this dialogue. They come to school equipped with the two crucial learning attitudes, namely curiosity and unhesitating confidence that it is worthwhile using language because language has been found to work in the home.

This need to give children adult time is the root of the case for teachers' aides. But the Plowden proposals did not go nearly far enough. We need aides in large enough numbers for the urban child to be given his own personal tutor for long uninterrupted periods of dialogue. By using students in training or between school and university in very large numbers with careful crash training an effective programme could be feasible at comparatively small cost.

Even if this proposal seems too far reaching, or too expensive, to be acceptable in the near future as a contribution to compensating the urban child for the disadvantages society has heaped on him[11], it will at least be agreed that we ought to try to enrich rather than further impoverish his verbal education. There is growing evidence from classroom-based research that there is a positive relationship between good second language instruction and pupils' intellectual development. Interesting confirmation of this is reported by C.I.C. Estacio[12]. He taught a 'corrective course' of English as a second language in Manila to college pupils aged seventeen, all 'linguistically substandard', of average I.Q. 100, who could not communicate, were poor in reading and could not write the simplest reports in English. He used a 'cognition-based' programme based on I.A. Richards' and Christine Gibson's Harvard Graded Direct Method. His programme is based on the idea that language learning can be a problem-solving activity, that material should reveal the patterns in the language, that language should be a study of meanings and that vocabulary chosen for usefulness is preferable to words chosen from frequency lists. Estacio sums up the report as follows: 'The observed results seem to support the assumption that instruction in language has a direct effect on the development of the cognitive processes.' Estacio's situation is of course different from ours but his experience does suggest that second language learning can be a valuable experience for less able learners. This is certainly borne out by the author's own experience of teaching French to pupils in a secondary modern school for the past seven years.

To our question *Why?* therefore we return this answer: less able children should be taught a foreign language because experience shows that, using appropriate methods, communication skills can be taught to the less able and because even when partially successful the study of a foreign language is an important element in a programme of verbal education that every child requires, but of which the less able among our pupils have special need.

The critics are quite right however in suggesting that at present a lot

[11] See, for example, the analysis of these cumulative disadvantages in Taylor's *Born and bred unequal*, Longmans, 1970.

[12] *The psychology of second language learning. Papers from the Second International Congress of Applied Linguistics*, Cambridge 1969. Pimsleur and Quinn, editors. CUP, 1971, pp. 189-94.

of time and effort is being wasted and opportunities for better things missed. Unless a better way can be found it is probably wisest and kindest to give up the struggle.

Some administrators and heads of schools of course will see the problem simply in terms of the economic use of scarce French teachers. They will be reluctant, reasonably enough, to 'waste' scarce teachers on poorly motivated pupils whose achievement is unimpressive. The matter then becomes one of judgement as to which pupils' needs are greatest and the issues we have discussed above may scarcely be thought relevant. However not all areas of the country experience equal staffing difficulties, nor need present shortages last for ever. In any case curriculum planning can only be soundly based if there is agreement about long term needs as well as short term constraints.

It is on the assumption that some schools at least will have the resources to offer language study to *all* the pupils for whom they have a responsibility, that we turn to the second part of our enquiry: how should less able pupils be helped to learn a language?

How?

There are no short cuts

Firstly I do not think it is a matter of finding gimmicks to sugar a pill by making the study seem relevant to the pop 'Atlantic' culture or by pretending a relevance to pupils' future careers that may not hold water. Nor do I think that the solution is to sweep under the carpet the real tasks that learning a language sets, like mastering grammatical relationships, and hope that they will go away if we don't talk about them. There are no short cuts either by tape or visual aid or language laboratory. The history of the discipline of language teaching is littered with the relics of attempts to find a panacea. But there is a difference between effective and ineffective teaching, between appropriate and inappropriate materials.

The concluding sections of this paper attempt to do two things:

(a) to examine what is involved in learning a foreign language and isolate particularly the learning problems posed to the less able, and

(b) to suggest ways in which the learning problems can be solved.

Insight into grammatical relationships

It is clear from research in testing aptitude for language learning that the most important single factor is insight into grammatical relationships. There seem to be several other important factors but this must come first. Pimsleur[13] has summed up the results of the research that lay behind both the Carroll and Sapon (MLAT) tests and his own (LAB) battery of aptitude tests. 'What is language aptitude made of? . . . The theory underlying the

[13] 'Testing foreign language learning', Paul Pimsleur. *Trends in language teaching*, A. Valdman, editor. McGraw-Hill, 1966, pp. 175-214.

LAB test, a theory derived empirically through analysis of experimental data, is that the "talent" for learning foreign languages consists of three components. The first is verbal intelligence, by which is meant both familiarity with words . . . and the ability to reason analytically about verbal materials . . . The second component is motivation to learn the language . . . The third component of language learning ability is called "auditory ability" . . .'

Pimsleur's measure for the first of his three components is a test of insight into grammar and a test of English vocabulary. The importance of grammatical insight into 'pattern' in language was confirmed by P. S. Green in the York Three Year Study. Of a battery of ten different aptitude tests used to predict performance at eleven plus the test of insight into grammatical relationships proved the most highly predictive.

The interesting point about the above research is that the very quality that it isolates as being important in language learning is the quality that Jensen claims disadvantaged pupils lack, namely insight into pattern in learning. Our teaching strategies must therefore deliberately set out to help pupils grasp the pattern in what they are learning.

Far from refraining from mentioning such matters, refusing to discuss them in English in terms the pupils can understand, or trusting to endless repetition for the penny to drop, it looks as if we ought to be looking (as in the Manila experiments referred to above) for ways of making more obvious the *pattern* in the foreign language for those pupils who do not at once see patterns emerging as new material is introduced. This will be an important aspect of the methodology we propose in the final section of this paper.

Motivation

(a) *Extrinsic motivation.*

Motivation in childrens' learning is of two kinds. One kind is the incentive to work at a subject for the sake of the reward it brings, in good marks at school, approbation at home, pass or credit in a future examination, an opening to a desirable career etc. The selective grammar school teacher is accustomed to pupils motivated in this way. Indeed the eleven plus examination largely selects pupils for a fair measure of this kind of motivation which is 'extrinsic' to the subject studied.

Less able pupils are less highly motivated in this sense for obvious reasons. They have had fewer rewards in the past for school work and they expect fewer in future.

The key factor in this aspect of motivation is located in the home background; it is the factor of parental encouragement. Somehow teachers of the less able must find ways of modifying parental attitudes. Some attempts to find ways of doing this are described later.

(b) *Intrinsic motivation*

A second kind of motivation is provided by attraction towards the new

learning for its own sake. This is interestingly discussed by Hunt[14]. There is space here for only the briefest summary. Hunt postulates that the functional unit of the nervous system is not the reflex arc but the 'feedback loop'. 'The notion of the feedback loop provides in turn the basis for a new answer to the motivational question concerning what starts and stops behaviour . . . The onset of behaviour becomes a matter of incongruity between the input from a set of circumstances and some standard within the organism . . . not unlike the thermostat which controls the temperature of a room.' This incongruity in new experience can both attract and repel depending on the extent of the 'missmatch'. D. O. Hebb[15] first gave at least implicit recognition to the notion of an optimum of incongruity in his theory of the nature of pleasure. In this theory he noted that organisms tend to be preoccupied with what is new but not too new in any situation. This suggests that controlling intrinsic motivation is a matter of providing an organism with circumstances that provide a proper level of incongruity — that is, incongruity with the residues of previous encounters with such circumstances that the organism has stored in his memory.

The problem for the foreign language teacher therefore is to find ways of keeping each step in the learning 'new but not too new' and of challenging his pupils with incongruities that are at the same time not too dissimilar from previous experience. It is as nice an exercise in judgement as a teacher could ever be challenged to make, and absorbingly interesting.

Aural discrimination

The feedback loop operates also in learning a new sound system. The ability to hear finely distinguished sounds interacts with the pupils' ability to pronounce them; there is feedback from the muscular system used in the production of sounds which helps the ear to discriminate more finely between sounds made by others and this aural discrimination in its turn by feedback shapes pronunciation.

A pupil's previous medical history, the habit of switching off in an unfriendly or noisy home background, or quite accidental factors like accumulations of wax on the ears can explain pupils' lack of aural discrimination. Habits of non-listening are formed and it is easy to go through life unaware of the aural environment. It is the same with sight. One does not 'see' much in a painting, in an architectural drawing or in a field in the country unless one knows what to look for.

The ear must be educated. It is a neglected aspect of education. Critical listening to the sounds, tune, stresses of a foreign language is an essential element in a programme of aural discrimination. This too must be built into our teaching programme and some examples of appropriate techniques are given later.

[14] ***Education of the disadvantaged.*** **Passow, Goldberg and Tannenbaum, editors. Holt Reinhart, 1967.**
[15] ***The organisation of behaviour.*** **Wiley, 1949.**

The French teacher should make common cause with the music teacher. There is some evidence that training in discrimination of musical rhythms, pitch and tune has effects on verbal discrimination and even affects general cognition. Little is known about how children come to acquire (or fail to acquire) a musical ear. It is a process that has much in common with language acquisition. On the basis of twelve semi-tones (phonemes), recursively repeatable in several octaves, the child comes to be able to recognise as 'grammatical' (i.e. truly in the major or minor key; balanced in one or other of a number of possible rhythmic structures; neither sharp nor flat at any point; having a 'verb', that is to say, resolving in the expected way) musical sentences (tunes) *that he has never heard before.* Some pupils can even generate new tunes that others will accept as fulfilling these excedingly complex 'syntactic' rules. These are Chomsky's definitions of the unique qualities of human speech. Acquisition of syntax, so very similar (if we omit the semantic element) to the musical process described above, has been judged so fantastic an achievement by the 4½ year old that Chomsky has suggested that the child must be born with a *language acquisition device* (LAD). The present author has facetiously made a similar claim for the inheritance of a *music (syntax) acquisition device* (a MAD?).

This digression is not entirely beside the point. The French teacher should get together with his musical colleagues just as this paper has suggested he make common cause with those who teach English and domestic science and geography to his pupils. It is after all the same pupil who journeys hopefully from class to class. Must he give up hope that his various teachers will some day meet?

Memory

This factor is not included in Pimsleur's components of aptitude though Carroll and Sapon do include rote memorisation among the four identifiable abilities in their measure of language aptitude[16].

(a) *Medium term memory*

The normal process of storage of new material in the memory and efficient retrieval from the store depends on linking the material with what is already stored. Young says[17] 'We need first to specify what sorts of items are stored. The suggestion is that the various items are often related to each other and that the store grows gradually in some sense as a unified structure.'

In helping children to remember, the wise teacher will bear in mind that what is already in the store matters as much as the new material to be linked with it.

There are, as we have seen, basically two ways in which new items can be linked with items in the existing store, by association (or continguity) or by sharing some feature or features (as part of a perceived pattern) with part

[16] The other factors being phonetic coding, grammatical insight and inductive language learning.

[17] *What can we know about memory?* Victor Horsley Memorial Lecture, 1969.

of the existing store.

These two storage strategies interact and reinforce each other, and obviously some items are stored and retrieved more easily by one strategy than by the other. Nevertheless it is probably true that linking items by association is a less efficient way of storage than linking by insight into pattern simply because the associative linking of two items is not generalised to other items.

This suggests a teaching strategy that is constantly helping pupils to see patterns and relationships. Observation suggests that this kind of insight improves with practice. It is partly a question of knowing what to look out for — as with ear and eye training.

Jensen's rote learners may lack practice (and confidence) in seeing links in their experience. This may well be one of the chief marks of early impoverishment of linguistic experience because it is mainly through language that patterned learning is acquired.

(b) *Short-term memory*

There is however another possible deficiency in the less able pupils' memory of which teachers are less aware. Before new items can be stored by being linked with items already in the store, there is a very brief interval (a couple of seconds only) immediately after they are encountered during which they can be recalled merely because the trace or echo lingers in the so-called short-term memory. Miller has written very entertainingly about STM[18]: 'Another Englishman, Joseph Jacobs, first performed this experiment with digits in 1887. He would read aloud a haphazard sequence of numbers and ask his listeners to write down the sequence from memory after he finished. The maximum number of digits a normal adult could repeat without error was about seven or eight.

From the first it was obvious that this span of immediate memory was intimately related to general intelligence. Jacobs reported that the span increased between the ages of eight and nineteen, and his test was later incorporated and is still used in the Binet intelligence test. It is valuable principally because an unusually short span is a reliable indicator of mental deficiency; a long span does not necessarily mean high intelligence.'

The important point for the teacher of the less able child is that pupils' STM capacities differ greatly. The present writer has found in experiments with secondary modern children a very close correlation between pupils' scores on a simple Miller type test of STM using random strings of digits and their performance scores after a year at French.

If pupils cannot hold in STM a new string of more than say three or four items long enough to repeat the string back they cannot make any link

[18] *The psychology of communication.* Allen Lane, The Penguin Press. 1967.

with items already in the longer term store, and so learning cannot take place.

The implication of this for the teacher of a foreign language to the less able is that pupils' STM must be tested regularly. Pupils with very limited STM must be known to the teacher (not only the foreign language teacher!) and for their benefit care must be taken to present new material in shorter pieces. Other devices are suggested in the final section of this paper.

If the above are the less able child's learning problems, they seem to point to the need for a teaching programme on the following lines, which may have something of value for all pupils.

Teaching programme: administrative framework

Certain assumptions are made in presenting this programme: that less able pupils have the same claim on the time of senior teachers or more successful teachers as abler pupils; that the less able should have equal access to the well decorated French room and not be banished to the shabbiest rooms in the school for their lessons like wandering homeless tribes; that, for instance, their classroom should contain a lively 'window on France' and several outline maps which they can annotate and progressively fill in with references found in their reading of the daily paper or heard on TV. In addition the following administrative measures should be considered just as normal as the expensive demands of natural science teachers for equipment and chemicals which (rightly) sustain the interest of pupils in science laboratories.

(a) The maximum amount of individual attention is necessary. The following measures are recommended:

(i) Group work taken frequently by *teams* of students training as teachers as well as by older pupils.

(ii) Frequent intensive remedial sessions of up to a week in length. In comprehensive schools sixth formers can be used, prepared for the work by teams of students. Attendance at remedial sessions is voluntary. Explaining difficulties (and looking up answers together with pupils) is one of the best ways of learning, as all beginning teachers have found. In a 'linear subject' such as a foreign language it is essential to fill in without delay the gaps in learning caused by absence or misunderstanding.

(iii) Flexible arrangements with teacher training colleges and UDEs for such group and remedial intensive work must be made. The tutors should also accompany school parties going abroad in order to permit staffing ratios of one to three or four.

This use of sixth formers and students must become the pattern for the future (cf. the growing use of such tutors in summer schools for immigrants[19]). Increasingly education must be seen rather as rock climbing than as long distance running, i.e. as each pitch is secured the climber who has been con-

[19] Eric Hawkins, *A time for growing*. Community Relations Commission, 1971.

centrating on finding his own way forward secures his rope and turns to his other (equal) obligation which is to the man behind him. We cannot afford if we want to be a community to see education any longer as a linear process of every man for himself. Students who ask society for a grant for three or four years of study of their chosen subject ought to be challenged to spend at least a year sharing their knowledge with the less able. Sixth formers also should be encouraged to play a part in the teaching as well as the learning process because in a good school increasingly both 'teachers' and 'pupils' will enjoy doing both.

(b) Links with schools abroad should be carefully nurtured — with monthly exchange of a form newsletter for wall display of material received, class committees assembling material and as an essential element *a visit at least for one long weekend each term* by a member of staff to the linked school. This will cost far less than the annual bill for consumable materials in the average chemistry laboratory which is at present paid by LEAs without demur. No LEA which did not recognise the need for such regular contact with the speech community being studied could claim to be serious about its modern language teaching. On each such termly visit the teacher would take with him at least one less able pupil who wished to go, and perhaps bring back with him the group of pupils referred to in the next paragraph.

(c) A very good investment would be to offer facilities to pupils from French or German schools to spend a term in British schools, as ordinary members of classes. The presence of even one such pupil in each class, to act as a model, point of reference, *agent provocateur,* reminding teacher and pupils that the language lives, could revitalise lessons *at all levels* but especially at lower ability levels. Exchange treaties on these lines should become commonplace when Britain joins the EEC.

(d) Each class should have the clear aim before it of visiting France during its fifth year. Preparations should begin at least three years in advance. The visit should involve a local survey requiring question and answer. The questions and possible answers are practised as part of the preparatory work. Slides and tapes made on previous class visits form part of the language preparation materials. The class visit should form part of a combined CSE subject : home economics and a language, or if preferred geography or social studies with a language. A comparative study is made of two regions, the home area, and the area of the linked school. Part of the assessed work shown to the examiner is the report on the local survey carried out abroad during the class visit.

During the class visit tutorial groups of three or four of the lower ability pupils each have their own group tutor found from established teachers doing courses for in-service training *à la James* but interested in learning how to set up such combined courses for CSE pupils.

Against the above background of administrative arrangements the teacher can present his subject to the less able child. His first decision must be the choice of the language to offer. French presents many difficulties and there are cogent arguments that suggest that Spanish, German or Italian

offer fewer problems in the early stages. The claims of Spanish seem particularly strong and the excellent Schools Council course *Adelante* has been prepared with the needs of average pupils in mind. Unfortunately few schools may be able to offer the range of languages they would wish. The accessibility of France must remain a powerful factor in determining the choice as well as the availability of French teachers.

The three stages of learning

The learning model recommended is that discussed by Bruner[20]. This suggests that children all pass through three stages in learning, utilising successively three models to interpret the environment and to make predictions about behaviour which are necessary for survival. The three stages are:

1. enactive (a model interpreting the environment in terms of operations with objects, physical movement, etc);
2. ikonic (a model using images);
3. symbolic (a model using symbols, 'images of images' preeminently written language).

Since we have all gone over this ground in all our learning through pre-school and primary school it makes sense when embarking on a new language to retrace a well known path via the same stages. This is what is attempted in a *French course for the majority*[21] at present under test in a number of schools with less able pupils. The other suggestions regarding class work made in this paper are also embodied in this course.

To retrace a learning process in this way ensures *confidence* in facing a new learning situation which is the prime requisite especially with pupils who have little reason to feel confident.

Making the pattern clear

We have seen that insight into pattern is the crucial factor in language learning aptitude. It should follow that insight stimulated or incited or encouraged by the teacher will aid language learning when the pupil does not bring this quality initially to the task provided that we can encourage pupils to learn what to look for. I know of no research except the sources quoted above (page 20) to support this but it seems to be confirmed by one's own experience with less able children.

The presentation of the language will therefore be accompanied at every stage by strategies designed to help pupils to discriminate pattern. The following are examples:

(a) Each pupil from the start is equipped with a blue and a red ball point pen. A colour code is established in which all drawings of feminine objects are done in red and of masculines in blue. Later when names are written and when pronouns, articles, adjectives arrive to complicate

[20] In *Studies in cognitive growth*. Wiley, 1966.
[21] Hawkins and Howson, editors. Oliver and Boyd, to be published in 1973.

the pattern, the colour code continues, reinforcing the idea of the two genders which is the most marked contrast in linguistic structures with English that French offers. Later on, during the second year, use of the colour code is allowed to phase out but it is brought back periodically to help establish patterns of agreement, e.g. when tackling the perfect tense. It is possible to play interesting agreement games using the two colours.

(b) Similarly a spatial code helps to distinguish genders. Objects whose names are being learned are kept in discrete collections on separate tables in the classroom with feminine and masculine in different places. Drawings of objects are similarly kept in discrete columns of the note book, with feminines always on the same side of the page.

(c) Initially wall pictures of objects are exhibited (in appropriate colour) on specially reserved places on the wall to reinforce association with gender.

(d) From an early stage pupils are encouraged to search for similarities and differences. English can be freely used where the pattern of the foreign language can be indicated by comparison or contrast with English.

(e) A useful device for drawing attention to similarities and pattern in new language material is the substitution frame first advocated by Palmer[22]. At its simplest the game can be played in this way. A model sentence is put on the board that the pupils know well. It is cut up by vertical lines into its working pieces (Palmer's word is 'ergons'). The pupils are then given a list of working pieces which will fit (or will not fit) into the various slots in the substitution frame. More sophisticated versions of the game can utilise the colour code to guide pupils in selecting e.g. adjectives.

(f) The gapped script is another device for stowing pattern. The gaps in the script given to the pupils must all be filled according to a pattern that they are encouraged to look for. Materials from which to choose in filling the gaps are provided, some of which are inappropriate. The game can be played in the language laboratory by giving pupils a recorded tape together with the gapped script. The tape supplies clues for pupils to listen to. The teacher can give individual additional help to the slower pupils over the intercom. This is one of the advantages of the language laboratory.

(g) The teacher will remember that he is also aiming at making his less able pupils more aware of language and he will therefore be quite prepared to spend quite a lot of time playing these and similar pattern searching games in English. This helps pupils to see what they are

[22] *Principles of language study*. Oxford University Press, 1964. (Reprint of 1921 edn.)

looking for and builds confidence in this kind of verbal manipulation.

(h) Trying to explain to others what one thinks one has grasped greatly helps learning. The technique can be used with less able children:

(i) at the start of each lesson a pupil describes the point discussed in the last lesson;

(ii) team leaders of groups explain to their groups what they have been briefed to explain by the teacher beforehand;

(iii) members of classes from the year above or two years above are brought in twos to a group to help the class groups into which the class is divided tackle a new part of the work;

(iv) homework can be set: describe the point discussed today as you would explain it to your younger brother who is only just starting French.

(i) Another way of helping pupils to see relationships and pattern is by setting 'correction of error' exercises, in which the error is departure from a pattern which must first be recognised.

Avoid bewilderment

This, quoted by Palmer as one of his rules for the language teacher, is still the golden rule for teachers of the less able. Begin with examples so obvious that all can understand. Practise games in English before trying them in French. Begin the lesson by asking a pupil to resume a point discussed yesterday. Establish a routine which reassures pupils that they know what to expect, but subtly vary the details to avoid boredom.

Above all fight to establish and maintain in the classroom an atmosphere where everybody helps his neighbour, where nobody sneers or crows, where the weakest voice is heard and effort not effect is rewarded. A glory of our subject is that at its best it *requires* that kind of class atmosphere.

Motivation

In discussing the problem (pages 21-22) we also suggested solutions. To summarise:

Intrinsic motivation

The subject will appeal intrinsically if material is new but not too new or new within an understood and confidence-building setting. Lessons should seek to be relevant to the pupils' existing knowledge and attitudes. Lessons should often be enlivened by imaginative strokes by the teacher. If pupils respond with imaginative surprises for the teacher he thanks his stars they are not apathetic and keeps his cool. There should be no bewilderment but a sensitive ear for boredom.

Extrinsic motivation

(a) The home attitude is the key. Perhaps in the seventies we may learn more about harnessing to school the potential power-house of

parental support. The following techniques may be useful :

(i) Regular showing to parents of tape/slide programmes (the slides are colour slides taken with flash of children's faces in close up accompanying their voices speaking French on tape). Slides from earlier years should be kept. Parents like to see pictures of their children when younger or to hear tape of their voices as they were a few years ago.

(ii) Language classes in the evening for parents starting at the same time as the children. They are encouraged to help each other and crib over homework. It very soon (from our experience) becomes the pupils who are helping the parents.

(iii) Taking parents into the language laboratory in the evening and working simple exercises in *English*.

(iv) Discussing with parents at the start of the course the importance of the fifth year visit to France and drawing parents into planning (and saving) for it.

(v) Discussing with parents or sending them a cyclostyled bulletin listing the ways in which by 1980 developments between Britain and European countries may increase the demand for some familiarity with a foreign language.

(b) Motivation is clearly influenced by what pupils know to be a teacher's sheer effectiveness. Here intrinsic satisfaction at spending time effectively merges with willingness to work when there is a sure prospect of some success. There might be realistic CSE goals to motivate less able pupils. There should for instance be the possibility of scoring high grades on listening comprehension, or on reading skills alone. This would encourage experiments in confining the writing of less able pupils to phonetic script as Sweet advocated or in the use of Pitman's French equivalent of the Initial Teaching Alphabet which he calls ADA, or in simpler forms of this.

Ear training

There should be constant, almost daily, exercises to train the ear. These can sometimes be quite short — matters of a moment to be introduced when some error in pronunciation or misunderstanding prompts it. More extended tests require pupils to mark $\surd$ or $\times$ when they detect similarities or differences. Other more complex tests will call for detection of a pattern. Endless changes can be rung on this theme of auditory discrimination and it can be a source of great encouragement when a class gets progressively better at it and begins to take pride in keen listening.

Memory and learning

The golden rule is that storage depends on linkage. Linkage depends on the learning strategy employed. It is assisted by :

(a) *Association :* Of course there must always be a lot of rote learning

preferably always in a context of dialogues, of number systems, of the calendar, of irregular past participles — as well as of songs, poems, proverbs, 'ruderies'. Some purely rote learning will probably form a learning task every week. But as we have seen rote learning is thought a necessary form of learning, of limited generalisation.

(b) *Insight into pattern:* This is the really powerful form of human learning and so of storage and retrieval. It is a major measure of intelligence in itself[23]. Learning a foreign language can be an irreplaceable opportunity in the curriculum to practice and gain confidence in categorising and specifically to acquire habits of looking carefully for what Bruner calls the 'criterial attributes' of a new item. That is the quality that makes it a member of a particular category. Nearly all cases of loose thinking are simple examples of grouping into sets items that ought or ought not (according to taste) to be categorised together in Bruner's terms. All racial or social or linguistic prejudice can be shown to be faulty categorising, though of course the causes of the faulty grouping are many, from ignorance or emotional distortion to the calculating mind which blurs categories for political purposes.

Verbal education is training in clear thinking as well as an aid to effective memory. The teacher will constantly be looking for links with what is already known and for opportunities to give practice in categorisation, as the principal mechanism of all problem solving.

Teachers' attitudes

Finally speech is a sensitive area. Many less able pupils will by eleven plus have retreated into silence in class, defensively refusing to utter for a whole complex of reasons. If they are to gain the confidence to find their voice (and the foreign language is the *only* subject in the curriculum where they will in linguistic terms start level with their more vociferous classmates) then the teacher must establish a confident relationship. Possibly the privacy of the language laboratory may have a special value for just such pupils. Much will depend on the teacher's good humour, sympathy, firmness with classmates who can otherwise be cruel, his dependability and equanimity and his own confidence that the task *is* within his pupils' powers. The pupils will quickly sense if the teacher does not believe they are worth teaching. It were far better then that he should not try.

[23] See J. S. Bruner and others. *A study of thinking*. Wiley, 1960. (Reprint of 1956 edn.)

— 3 —

A foreign language for all?

A. W. HORNSEY

In recent years educational opportunities have been made much more widely available and certain inequalities in schooling have been removed. Unfortunately, however, treating all children equally can lead to making inappropriate demands on some of them. Even worse, in opening educational doors to all, we might be guilty of assuming that all the old doors are worth opening, that yesterday's prestige subjects should still have first priority for all children today.

In a number of European countries the teaching and learning of foreign languages has always carried prestige. Being able to use and understand a foreign language has been seen and still is seen as evidence of good education. In England however the prestige of the foreign language has tended in the past to be associated with the image of an 'educated gentleman' who could not necessarily use the language or with notions of 'mind-training' derived from faculty psychology. The result of the former is possibly seen in the emphasis on writing and therefore 'literature' to the almost complete exclusion of speech and the latter has led to undue concern with the niceties of prescriptive grammar. Ironically, at one and the same time, it has been maintained that 'Englishmen cannot learn foreign languages' and yet a pass in one of these 'unlearnable' subjects has been a prerequisite for entry into higher education. For my present purposes I am assuming that we are now interested in learning languages because :

(1) they allow us to widen the range of people who can speak to us and to whom we can speak;

(2) they permit us to read written texts to which we would otherwise have no access;

(3) they can introduce us to a different culture.

In other words, languages are taught because they are beneficial rather than because *the process of learning them* makes us superior or disciplines our minds. I would add that I can see no *a priori* grounds for assuming that all courses for all children should pursue all the three benefits I have listed above.

Thus you learn a language because it does something for you when it has been learnt. It is essentially a tool. Audio-visual and oral-based courses are designed as a more reasonable way to learning language as a tool than was the traditional activity of learning *about* a language, its rules and its grammar. In other words, the latest courses are clearly purpose-built to provide learners with a tool. Their justification is in the end not in the means, which can include such 'uneducational' activities as parroting, rote-memorising and tedious repetition. I can discover no argument which shows that there is any clear educational value in following one of these courses if, in fact, the desired end is not reached. My first hint of caution is therefore that the one goal (language as a tool for communication), pursued by methods which have no educational pay-off within themselves, can be dangerous when applied to all children, because those who do not or can not reach the goal have nothing to show for their efforts.

Using a language is a skill and not just a condition produced by habitual contact. This is the clearest lesson which the scientific study of linguistics can offer the practising foreign language teacher. To acquire this skill in cramped conditions, with classes of up to forty and only five lessons a week, the learner needs to understand what he is learning. We grasp the system of our mother tongue largely spontaneously through long exposure to it but we cannot hope for the same spontaneity in the short time available for the foreign language in school. Short cuts are needed. The learner has to learn to work in a field in which responses are virtually infinite in number. He will even have to produce language based on his ability to make the right analogies and deductions even though the evidence for them is unavoidably small. He must use language which *he has never heard before* but which is consistent with generally accepted conventions; language as used by the imaginary French boy in the following scene in an inventor's workshop :

Boy : *Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?*
Inventor : *C'est une manaille. Je m'en sers pour trendre les liquides.*
(The inventor uses the gadget and puts it down, but he forgets where.)
Inventor : *Qu'est-ce que j'ai fait avec ma manaille?*
Boy : *Vous l'avez mise sur la table après avoir trendu les liquides.*

The boy has never before used a sentence referring to a *manaille* nor a past tense of the verb *trendre* but his response conforms to accepted rules of syntax and morphology. He has created a new piece of language[1]. A learner of the language must be able to create in the same way. If he has not progressed beyond simple concrete-operational thinking or if he cannot handle new concepts with some stability and consistency, he will not be able to handle a foreign language creatively because he cannot be given sufficient experience to grasp the system spontaneously and in any case the new system conflicts with the well-established system of his mother tongue. There are a lot of

[1] Quoted from Hornsey, 'Recent developments in foreign-language teaching in England : a personal view' *Babel*. July 1971, vol. 7, no. 2.

children in our secondary schools who cannot meet these conditions. We cannot give them a year in France to increase their contact with the language and we cannot give them more hours of the foreign language per week in school if their curriculum is to be properly balanced.

The foreign language teacher must be able to rely on certain qualities in the learner. For example, the latter needs to be willing to make new sounds which differ from the accepted vocalisations of his everyday world; he has to have some notion that Western European languages make changes according to the time when events take, took or will take place; he has to be able to accept, for example, the existence of pronouns which are both personal and indefinite (French *on*, German *man*). Many children can do these things, but even a cursory glance at Bernstein's work will remind us that these needs will be real barriers for children who do not habitually use a public language, who will stubbornly refuse to speak with other than their local accent and for whom the rejection of this is yet another cause of conflict with the tone of school, who are not in the habit of using future tenses and who do not employ 'one' or its equivalents as indefinite pronouns. It is a nice question, but can we expect to teach 'elaborate' French to children whose use of their own language is 'restricted'? In the latest NFER study[2], failure in French seems to be as much a reflection of poor socio-economic background, even at primary school level, as is failure in other subjects.

Attempts have been made to extend the learner's contact with French to times when the teacher is not present. The language laboratory and group-work have been tried, but the former has not yet been shown empirically to make any significant contribution to the learning of young children and the latter is more appropriate to background culture than to language work, where the presence of a good model is essential. In fact, in expecting young learners to learn a language from one another, one has to dismiss all that Luria discovered about the backwardness in language development of his twins[3]. The written word seems to be the only real possibility of extending contact and its use has the support of such authorities as Wilga Rivers and Belyayev. Dodson in Wales has done experiments which show that even the beginner makes faster and more accurate progress if he sees new material in writing as well as just hearing it[4]. Writing does seem to be a valuable aid sooner or later, but once it is introduced, the less able child begins to fall behind[5], which is hardly surprising if, for example, he has real difficulties with the written word in his mother tongue. Thus, if we use writing to extend contact, it is precisely those who need most help who derive least benefit from it.

The absence of mature understanding, the lack of contact, restricted language awareness and the inability to derive benefit from using the written

[2] *French in the primary school: attitudes and achievement.* C. Burstall, NFER, 1970.
[3] *Speech and the development of mental processes in the child.* Staples Press, 1959.
[4] 'The role of the printed word in foreign-language learning'. *Modern Languages,* 47, 2, June 1966, pp. 59-63.
[5] NFER, op. cit.

word are all problems which can be overcome if the learner really wants to learn — if, for instance, he is living in a foreign country and needs to cope with life there or if he needs a language to get a remunerative job. The intelligent nineteenth century gentleman or diplomat had no doubt that French was worth learning. But English has since become the world language, French is no longer the obvious first language for an English-speaking learner to learn, pop culture is Anglo-American, and the teenager cannot be convinced that he needs to learn French or any other foreign language. What is more, both the NFER and the Schools Council have discovered that the teenager's parents are not convinced of the value of a foreign language either[6]. Motivation is weak, and in any case the goals involved are very long-term. For those among the learners who hardly ever use a future tense, who, according to Bernstein[7], live essentially in the present, the idea of setting out on a slow grind which in five years *might* result in their being able to speak a little of a foreign language is distinctly unattractive :

> 'The less people talk or think in words about what they are experiencing, the less they are likely to be affected by what is not actually at present part of their experience, and thus the less likely it is that their actions will be affected by the consideration of factors which are obscure, general, abstract, or hidden in the future.'[8]

We ought to abandon the unreal aim of 'a language for all' and employ a strategy more in keeping with the children we teach than with the traditional status of the subject. We should *offer* a foreign language to all, but quickly accept different goals for different children. Some will aim at communication at the highest level, and this will be a homogeneous group in keeping with the cumulative nature of the process of learning a language for communication. Some will aim at a basic receptive awareness concentrating on understanding and reading. Some will study the foreign country rather than its language and their one year of language work might act as a starting point for a short intensive course prior to a visit abroad. These children will not be hoodwinked into believing that they are actually learning the language. There will be others who, given the confines of the normal school week, will be doing work which they, their parents and their teachers can see to be more directly related to their present and future needs.

Once we cease to pretend that all children can become French speakers and recognise that a lot are gaining nothing by trying to do so, we will be able to make French and France more appropriate as school subjects. Some, instead of having grown to dislike compulsory French, might even choose to learn it intensively during the promised extra year at school, and with more time, more concentration and more desire, they might achieve some of the success which, for example, can be achieved on some of the intensive Services

[6] NFER, op. cit., and *Schools Council enquiry 1: young school leavers.* HMSO 1968, pp. 57 & 63.
[7] 'Some sociological determinants of perception'. *British Journal of Sociology,* 9, 1968.
[8] Josephine Klein, quoted in Lawton, *Social Class, Language and Education,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968, p. 15.

courses. Above all, we need to remember that, while a foreign language well taught to willing pupils can lead to positive attitudes to the foreign country, compulsory exposure of unwilling or unable pupils can have the opposite effect. The NFER report, which I have already referred to, identifies substantial groups of children whose frustration in French is united with general anti-foreign prejudice and 'little Englandism'.

In conclusion I would like to list some basic realities of our language teaching scene in the hope that their discussion might begin to lead to attempted solutions :

1. Entry into the Common Market is not likely to create a mass demand for foreign languages but it will mean that diplomats, technocrats, bureaucrats, salesmen, politicians and many other individuals will need to handle at least one of the community's languages. How do we identify these people and ensure that they are well taught?

2. If a child dislikes history but is forced to study it, he will probably develop a hatred of history and possibly of the history teacher. This however seems to me to be less tragic than his developing a hatred of a foreign people and country because he is forced to study their language.

3. When a language is being taught, children will progress at different rates. In mother-tongue teaching the bright child is a good model for the less bright one. Even the best in the foreign language are still inadequate models. How do we overcome this problem if we believe that streaming is socially undesirable?

4. Skill learning benefits from intensity and experience. How do we reconcile this with the traditional pattern of the school day and with the demands for a balanced curriculum?

5. We must urgently assess the real benefits to be derived from doing a foreign language at school. We need to rid the discussion of words like 'status' and 'prestige' and still find answers to those educational philosophers who do not see a foreign language as representing a 'form of knowledge' and therefore do not wish to see a foreign language at all in the schools. We need, for example, to make clear how much is lost in human contact when one depends on translations and interpreters.

— 4 —

A plea for realism in teaching slow learners

M. V. SALTER

This paper arises from my concern with what is happening in the teaching of foreign languages to pupils at the lower end of the ability-range in the secondary school*. My specific concern is with the frustration often felt by teachers as well as by their pupils. The Newsom Report (1), nearly ten years ago, stated that 'Given good conditions, a foreign language, taught in a well-conceived oral course and enlivened wherever possible by direct contacts with a foreign country, might well be one of the most stimulating subjects in the curriculum for some of the pupils of this report'. In the intervening years, pupils of an increasingly wide ability-range have embarked on the study of a modern language (usually French) and in many secondary schools a language is a part of the curriculum for all pupils in their first two years. While many of the 'Newsom' pupils have clearly benefited from this new dimension in their education, it is questionable whether this benefit often extends to the least gifted children. The purpose of this paper is therefore to present certain arguments and to make a few suggestions with the object of stimulating discussion.

First of all, who are these least gifted children? In the DES survey *Slow learners in secondary schools* (2), slow learners were found to constitute fourteen per cent of the total population of the schools visited, though the percentages for individual schools ranged from seven to sixty. A working party of ILEA modern language teachers, reporting in a document entitled *Teaching a foreign language to slow learners* (3), defined the slow learner as a 'child with a reading age of two or more years behind his chronological age'. I propose in this paper to use the term 'slow learners' and to have in mind those with IQs ranging from about 70 to about 85. I realise that, in defining 'slow learners' in these terms, I am not giving special attention to children with physical, emotional or social handicaps which may affect language learning and that some of the children with such handicaps will undoubtedly have IQs

* Although I am on secondment from HM Inspectorate to the Schools Council, the views contained in this paper are my own and should be attributed to neither body

in excess of 85. My reasons are twofold. First, there is a limit to the groupings of children which a school's organisation for modern language teaching can permit. Secondly, I am convinced that what I propose will meet the needs of most of these children.

Many teachers question whether a foreign language should be taught to slow learners. And yet the pressures for doing so are often found to be overriding. The emphasis is increasingly on a common curriculum, at least up to the age of 13, on giving the same opportunities to all children irrespective of ability, on avoiding giving the slow learner any feeling that he is different from his abler brethren. Moreover, many schools organise their teaching so that for some or all of their time pupils are in teaching-groups containing a very wide ability-range. In this situation, it is difficult to envisage some pupils being barred from studying a foreign language. Teachers ask the question with which this paragraph began partly because they are convinced that slow learners have so little real incentive to learn a foreign language and partly because they feel that what is achieved with them rarely seems to justify all the effort involved. What I have seen of this kind of work suggests to me that, whatever the educational benefits to the pupil, the linguistic ones are often very limited.

However, it is is not intended in this paper to argue whether a foreign language should or should not be taught to slow learners, but to start from the assumption that many of them will be learning a language, at least in their first two years in the secondary school. Such children can find themselves in streamed forms, in sets based upon their assumed linguistic potential, in bands with a wider ability-range than streamed forms, or in completely unstreamed forms. In the last case, as the ILEA report (3) indicates, the 'slow learner will certainly be at a disadvantage . . . if the teacher is not successful in applying individual methods of instruction, or class grouping' — a kind of teaching which makes considerable demands on the teacher. In fact, observation of foreign language learning in unstreamed classes shows that all too often the average child is best catered for, with corresponding (though understandable) neglect of the needs of the most and least able pupils.

It is interesting to note that the DES survey (2) states that ' a genuine belief that the slow learners should participate, certainly in their first two years, in a common curriculum can have unfortunate effects'. While the DES survey is probably concerned with a slightly narrower ability-range than we are here, I would have thought that this statement can hardly fail to have at least one implication for the slow learner faced with something so alien to his experience as a foreign language. My point is not that this kind of pupil should necessarily be excluded from language learning, but that his needs may be radically different from those of his abler fellows. At the moment, even where he is taught in a relatively homogeneous group, his diet tends to be a watered down version of what the abler child is given : less is expected of him, but he is still usually taught as if he will develop some mastery of the skills of understanding, speaking, reading and writing the foreign language. By the time he reaches the end of his second year, he is usually

only too ready to give up his foreign language and his relief is often shared by his teacher. It is not surprising that Mrs Burstall felt impelled to write, at the end of her chapter on 'Pupils' attitudes towards learning French in the secondary school' in *French in the primary school: attitudes and achievement* (4): 'To judge from the pupils' own comments, there is a strong case for redefining the objectives of teaching French, to meet the pupils' differing needs'.

What are the characteristics of these slow learners? According to the ILEA report (3), they have 'difficulty in perceiving patterns in language'; 'they do not perceive precisely either aurally or visually'; and they 'cannot concentrate on anything for long, are easily distracted'. 'It takes them a very long time to grasp even the simplest new idea, and they have great difficulty in retaining what they have learnt; so that the same things have to be taught afresh over and over again — and then they quickly get bored. Since language learning is cumulative, some pupils make no progress at all.' Taylor, in his symposium *The teacher as manager* (5), says that 'Problems of the slow learners are different not only in degree but also in kind' and suggests that we have to decide 'whether some children will ever become functionally literate'; he looks ahead to the time 'when learning mainly through the written word is recognised as unsuitable for perhaps twenty-five per cent or more of pupils'. What is so significant about Taylor's point is that he is not referring specifically to the learning of a foreign language: if he is right about other subjects of the curriculum, how right he must be about modern languages where the printed and written word gives rise to so many difficulties for slow learners.

The DES survey (2) asks for a 'suitably devised curriculum' for slow learners. This 'might be expected to concentrate less on attempting to remedy the irremediable and more on providing opportunities for growth and fulfilment in those areas of the curriculum where greater achievements are possible'. For our possibly wider band of slow learners with a modern language in their curriculum, this suggests to me that we should concentrate less on teaching the unteachable and more on providing realistic opportunities for fulfilment. What we expect of these children should accordingly be based on a clear understanding of what the majority of them are capable of achieving.

Let us first remind ourselves of their limitations. Language-learning is generally assumed to be a linear process and essentially cumulative. Given the slow learners' 'great difficulty in retaining what they have learnt' (3), I have come to the conclusion that for most of them this kind of learning is inappropriate. They forget far more than they remember with the result that the linguistic edifice which the teacher tries to construct crumbles at every stage. With the limited amount of language practice available in the normal timetable and the even smaller amount of motivation, their command of the spoken language does not grow in complexity, they do not retain the essential patterns, and they forget much of the vocabulary. It is understandably rare for them to be able to re-use independently anything that they have learnt in the foreign language. On the other hand, there is evidence that they can be taught to understand the spoken word to a far higher level than that at which they use

it. Often this understanding is masked by the method used to test it. If the slow learner has to reveal his understanding by productive use of the language he will frequently be unable to do so. Questioned in his own language, he is more likely to be able to demonstrate this understanding. This conviction is based on observation of slow learners taught with audio-visual courses and in particular of such pupils in the Schools Council French Pilot Scheme. The implication of what has been said so far is therefore that the slow learner, in normal classroom circumstances, can be taught only a very limited speaking skill, but a much more highly developed comprehension skill.

It is becoming increasingly common in gatherings of Europeans for each to speak his own language and to understand his interlocutor speaking his. Frenchmen and Englishmen working on the Concorde project have communicated in this way. If this is acceptable practice at intellectual levels far above that of our slow learners, why should we not make a teaching method of it for the latter? What I am suggesting is that, as far as the spoken language is concerned, we (a) develop in them the skill of listening comprehension to the highest degree possible; (b) equip them to deal in very elementary language with a clearly specified number of everyday situations where the foreign language may be needed, e.g. visits to shops, stations, garages, etc; (c) assume that in most situations in which they are likely to converse with foreigners they will speak English and the foreigners their own language.

Reading, like understanding the spoken language, is commonly described as a receptive skill. How far the slow learner can learn to read effectively and *with profit* I find hard to determine. Teachers' opinions on this point range from a conviction that such children can learn to read for gist passages of the foreign language which can be expected to interest them to an equal conviction that reading for survival (notices, road-signs, the names of shops . . .) is all that they can manage. The reading skill demanded of these pupils will vary according to the nature of their teachers' conviction. It does, however, seem to me important to be utterly realistic about the writing skill. These pupils are most unlikely to acquire a writing skill which can give them any real satisfaction and certainly not a skill of which they can make use. Moreover, for the majority of them writing is the skill which in their own language marks them out from their fellows, which emphasises their inferiority. I would therefore cut writing in the foreign language out of the language learning of these pupils.

It is often said that a language is a means of communication, but in teaching languages we are frequently less than precise about what ought to be communicated. The kind of language course which I have outlined should have as one of its fundamental aims to enable the pupils to learn as much as possible about Europe. *An integrated course in European studies*, produced by teachers in Somerset under the leadership of the Authority's Adviser for Modern Languages, contains many admirable ideas for the European studies element of such a course.

At least two objections can be raised to what I have suggested. First,

it may be asked whether the kind of course proposed would provide an acceptable means of continuing French which has been begun in the primary school. Where slow learners have been taught French along well-conceived lines in the primary school, one is justified in expecting and therefore aiming at a higher level of listening comprehension than would otherwise be possible, but I am convinced that what I have suggested for the other three skills remains appropriate for these children irrespective of their previous experience of the language. Indeed, the setting of realistic goals might make it possible to obviate the sense of failure which so many of them evince at the secondary stage.

The second objection is that it would be very difficult to teach slow learners in the way outlined if they were in a mixed ability class. It is on account of the considerable difficulty which this situation would present to so many teachers that I would prefer to see such pupils taught a foreign language at the secondary school in *relatively* homogeneous classes. If first year pupils in some secondary schools have to be taught a foreign language in mixed ability classes, it may prove necessary to embark on the specially devised course at the beginning of the second year. Where this happens, it must be realised that the unreasonable demands which are likely to be made of the slow learners during this first year may well, as indeed is so common already, 'kill' the subject for them.

It would not be fitting, even if it were possible, to attempt to provide answers to all the questions to which the subject gives rise. The precise answer to one question must undoubtedly await experimentation: what materials would be needed to teach a modern language in the way suggested? At this stage it is desirable to make only rather general statements. For teaching a very limited speaking skill, the main requirement would be suitable visuals, although it is important to remember how readily slow learners misunderstand images presented to them in only two dimensions and how much more they are likely to learn from three-dimensional situations. While some use would be made of tapes in teaching this limited speaking skill, I would suggest that this should be to a lesser extent than with abler children and that the teacher's voice should play a correspondingly larger part. A more important skill for slow learners is that of understanding a foreign language spoken by a native. For this purpose, a wide variety of visuals and tapes would be needed. The Schools Council Modern Languages Project is producing interesting materials for teaching, practising and testing listening comprehension. Even though slow learners would rarely have their understanding tested by use of the foreign language, the Project's thinking and techniques would repay study. The Somerset document (6) contains valuable ideas for European studies. Much material already exists in English of which use could be made; there is certainly a need for more. While there is clearly an important rôle for publishers here, enterprising teachers will always draw to some extent on their own resources and on those of colleagues in other subjects of the curriculum.

Finally, who should teach a foreign language to the slow learners? It

may well be that the best person would often be an experienced teacher of slow learners who, in his initial or in-service training, had acquired the necessary skill in the language and methodology. What is unquestionable is that the work will be done by teachers whose backgrounds, training and experience vary considerably. I am sure that the ILEA report (3) is right in asserting that a 'conviction that these children should be taught a modern language is the foundation for making progress with them'. It is not a job for the uncommitted. The object of this paper has been to suggest objectives which are likely to prove realistic to both teachers and their pupils.

References

(1) *Half our future.* Central Advisory council for Education, 1963.

(2) DES Education Survey 15, *Slow learners in secondary schools,* 1971.

(3) The Modern Language Centre, ILEA, *Teaching a foreign language to slow learners: reports from two working parties,* autumn 1971.

(4) Clare Burstall, *French in the primary school: attitudes and achievements.* NFER, 1970.

(5) George Taylor, *The teacher as manager,* a symposium published by the National Council for Educational Technology.

(6) *An integrated course in European studies,* produced by a working party set up by the Somerset LEA.

— 5 —

French across the ability range in London

S. M. STOKER

As far as I can find out, it is not known what proportion of the London secondary schools organised their pupils into classes containing the whole ability range of their age-group in, say, 1967; but as one talks to teachers now it becomes quite clear that this policy is making noticeable headway in London. Now more than half of them (about twenty-five per cent) have adopted it: a further ten per cent or so use the practice of 'banding' their pupils in broad categories of ability, so that within these bands the classes are of mixed ability; the rest (about thirty-five per cent) arrange their pupils, in fairly small degrees of difference, in streams or sets.

It is too soon for many of these schools to assess how far mixed ability teaching is fulfilling their hopes, but the hopes must have been considerable to account for a swing of this magnitude.

What is significant for us, however, is that languages are considered a special case by more than half of the schools that have adopted mixed ability teaching as a general policy. About sixty-three per cent of them stream for French (and perhaps for mathematics as well) either from the beginning or after one or two years. It is interesting that the special claims of language teaching have prevailed in so many schools over what is often a very strong conviction, a conviction compounded of elements pedagogical, political, emotional.

With this confrontation of opposing views I am not, in my particular part of our general discussion, concerned. My brief is with the language teacher in a London school faced (whether willingly or unwillingly) with the task of imparting to mixed ability classes the skill of speaking, and perhaps of reading and writing, French, and to say something of his attitude. The air is full of problems! And the problems are being tackled with as many degrees of dismay, misgiving, determination or optimism as there are teachers concerned. It is not a question of goodies and baddies: on the one hand lazy teachers who prefer keeping to the methods — and the textbooks — they

know to being thrown into a pot seething with problems and made to come up with something new, and on the other those who are willing to be upheaved in the interests of the children. There is an element of this, human nature being what it is, but the number of Piglets who would rather keep their own comfortable colour than be bathed is smaller than the cynics think. The division of opinion is the result of a genuine difference about which arrangement offers the children the better opportunity of making headway in French, and indeed about whether the advantage in the pupils' personal development thought by many to attend mixed ability teaching should take precedence over the better success in his language learning thought by many to attend being taught in homogeneous groups. For a language teacher who is out of sympathy with mixed ability teaching for sound professional reasons, his reluctance may be compounded by a feeling that he is unprepared for the task through his experience and training.

I should put in here a word about staffing the modern language departments, since Dr. D. C. Riddy recently predicted in *The Times Educational Supplement*[1] that, if present trends continue, by 1980 we shall find we have only about one tenth the number of French teachers that we need in the primary schools. The situation cannot be very different in the secondary. The advent of mixed ability teaching has brought, in London as elsewhere, a great increase in the number of pupils learning French and therefore in the number of teachers required. This has already caused something of a crisis in London. There are secondary schools here at the moment where no French is taught at all because no teacher can be found; there are schools where the small amount of French that is taught is taught by one, or two, part-time teachers; on the other hand there are schools where the language staff are numerous enough for the children to be divided into groups smaller than class-sized, sometimes as small as fifteen.

Accommodating the time-table to the availability of part-time teachers plays havoc with it in any subject, but the effect in language is more disastrous than in most others. Most experienced language teachers seem to agree that the pupils, especially the younger ones, should have a single lesson each day; but it is common for part-time teachers not to be able to come in each day, so a class will either have its French lessons badly arranged on the timetable or it will have too few lessons or it will be taught French by two different teachers. When these difficulties are added to those attendant upon mixed ability teaching the trouble is compounded. The schools that cope in the most competent and spirited manner with mixed ability language classes are — not surprisingly — those with a department of full-time teachers. This is a platitude, but the difference this factor makes is noticeable.

Mr Penty's paper[2] deals with primary French — that important area of French teaching across the ability range — but perhaps it will not come amiss if I describe what goes on in London. A recent survey undertaken at

[1] *The Times Educational Supplement*, 25 February 1972.
[2] See pp. 57-61.

the Modern Language Centre produced a response from 463 primary schools out of 600. Of these 158 teach French, 145 more would like to begin or resume and will probably do so if and when a teacher or teachers can be found, and 160 do not teach French and have at present no intention of doing so. With this bald factual statement the cut-and-dried element of our information is at an end. It depends what you mean by the statement 'French is taught'. London is not part of the Nuffield experiment, and the number or variables in London primary French classes produces a positive kaleidoscope. The primary school child may have three years, two years or one year of French before entering the secondary school; he may have a lesson every day or once a week; his teacher may be a gifted teacher with not very advanced French or a not-so-gifted teacher with excellent French or a combination of any degree of prowess in either field; he may be taught by any one of eight published methods or by something of the teacher's own devising, but this is certain, except in a very few schools, to be an audio-visual method with spoken French as the main objective; he may begin to read and write French or he may not; he may be taken to France or he may not. As far as method is concerned, by far the majority of primary schools in London where French is taught (118 out of the 158 who are known to teach French) use *Parlons français,* which is broadcast to every school by the Authority's closed-circuit television; but in the presence of the other variables this is not enough to give the receiving secondary schools any idea of what to expect. But there is one common element here which is lacking in the secondary schools: namely that virtually all the teachers are accustomed to teaching across the ability range. This is so firmly a part of present-day primary school life that no one is likely seriously to question it, or to want it changed. It is true that many a primary French class is organised in streams within itself. Group work is fairly common, and quite often the groups are organised according to ability or achievement in French. I do not know of any school in which all, or even most, of the French lessons are conducted in this way; those that use it do so only occasionally. The severity of the full range of mixed ability does not persist in all primary schools for the whole length of the course. I have no figures to offer here, but in some schools children who are receiving no benefit drop out of the French class; as far as I know, if this is going to happen it has generally happened before the end of the fourth term. I have dwelt awhile on the variegated picture of French in London primary schools not because of any passion I have for variety or for uniformity; it is relevant here because it adds another factor for the secondary teacher to consider. Some might think this particular situation is easier to handle in a mixed ability class than in a streamed one.

A factor which adds to the difficulties of teaching a secondary mixed ability class, in languages as in other subjects, is the element of compulsion, which can produce boredom and intransigence in some pupils. Seventy per cent of the secondary schools here make French a compulsory subject for all their pupils, for periods ranging from one to five years (those prescribing the five-year term include all the selective schools and not many others); twenty per cent make French compulsory for all pupils in the top band, again for

periods ranging from one to five years, with three the most common; the remaining ten per cent make French compulsory, either for two or for three years, for all pupils except those in need of remedial treatment. These figures are taken from a representative sample of half the schools.

Though I am not, as I said, concerned with discussing the merits of mixed ability teaching I might perhaps spend a moment or two enumerating the points that have come up when London teachers talk the matter over. For one thing, the weak end of the class spectrum seems to preoccupy them more than the able end. I do not mean by this that they direct their attention while teaching mainly to the less able members of the class, but that this is the aspect of their task that causes them most concern. This may well be because, underlying and aggravating the prevailing uncertainty about the techniques of mixed ability teaching, there lurks for some the horrid feeling that they are not doing their duty by weak and very weak pupils in teaching them a foreign language at all. This, combined with the opinion which one often hears expressed that the abler children could get on faster if they were taught in a group alone, takes the heart out of them somewhat.

This discouragement does exist, but I would not have you think that gloom prevails entirely. I must say something of the schools where mixed ability teaching of French is accepted spiritedly as a challenge, where an ably led department devotes an immense amount of time, skill, sweat, patience and ingenuity to meeting the challenge and where mixed ability teaching is having some of the success that its champions hold out as a sure reward : better class discipline, the children gaining confidence through unexpected success, through helping each other, through enjoyment of varied work. At a recent meeting I attended at which teachers were discussing mixed ability teaching the conditions necessary for success were summed up as five :

(a) the class must be small;

(b) the head of the school must be prepared to spend money on resources;

(c) there must be a resource room in two parts : one part permanently supervised where children may work, the other arranged for staff to prepare and store material;

(d) compulsion upon a child to continue a to him unrewarding course in French must not exceed two years;

(e) there must be enough time on the teacher's timetable designated for making material.

It might be argued that these five conditions are necessary for all language teaching, and have no special relevance to teaching mixed ability classes. It may well be that these conditions are rarely to be found anywhere in the country; they are centainly as yet quite rare in the Authority's schools. If they could be provided even for mixed ability classes alone, teachers would hail this as a substantial step in the direction of much-needed reform.

A further point about the timetable is often made. Practical subjects have always been allotted double periods, but there seems to have been recently a marked increase in the use of double periods for content subjects from the first year onwards. The effect of this is that subjects which should be taught in single periods, such as French, are pushed into line and have double periods too, willy-nilly. A survey shows that it is nearly always nilly. Pace is essential in language teaching, and it taxes the teacher's ingenuity and drains his energy to keep up the pace for so long at a time with one group of children in a subject which, more than any other, requires a 'performance' from him.

This is what the London language teachers are saying about mixed ability teaching. If they could be listened to, if they could be given the conditions I have just outlined, then they could all, instead of just some, begin to feel that here indeed is a challenge, and one worthy of their efforts and offering their pupils some solid reward.

— 6 —

Methods and materials

E. R. ELLARD

After the Second World War, there was great optimism in modern language circles in Britain, in part a reflection of the general wish to create a better world in which language learning would promote greater understanding between nations. It was felt that many more children should and would begin to learn a foreign language and a series of important documents appeared which it would be useful to consider chroonologically to see how they reflect a changing situation and the developing reaction to it.

In 1951, the Modern Language Association published *Modern languages in the secondary modern school,* which balanced the urgent need to encourage foreign language teaching across a wider range of ability, with the courageous experimentation that would ensue, against the problems of staffing, timetable, equipment and materials, finally taking an optimistic view of the future situation.

Five years later, the Ministry of Education issued *Modern languages,* which placed much emphasis upon the need to expand the teaching of foreign languages, giving children of meagre ability the opportunity to embark upon such courses. In describing the language teaching situation in secondary modern schools it stressed the qualities needed by the teachers, explained the limited but valid objectives to be aimed at, recommended the most appropriate methods of teaching and recognised that restricted vocabulary and structures were necessary. This pamphlet too was optimistic about the benefits of a modern language course for these pupils.

The general re-organisation of secondary education itself in the 1960's had important implications for modern language teaching; curriculum development there could not be separated from what was happening across a broader spectrum. In 1963, the Newsom Report, *Half our future,* deplored the fact that very large numbers of average and below average pupils were denied the opportunity of learning a language.

Without doubt, the most important general experiment in modern language teaching has been the introduction of French into selected numbers

of primary schools, with the resulting effect on the secondary sphere, and which in part was an attempt to discover if there are 'levels of ability below which the teaching of a foreign language is of dubious value'. The same sense of optimism as in the earlier documents mentioned has also been expressed in this context, especially in Working Paper No. 8, *French in the primary school*, and in the reports it included of the Torquay Conference of December 1965.

This continuous note of optimism, stretching across more than twenty years, has tended to weaken recently as more and more teachers have become conscious of the problems facing them as a result of the new methods, the earlier start, the increased numbers of pupils, the shortage of manpower, materials and equipment. Perhaps the first note of pessimism, or at least of doubt, was struck in Working Paper No. 19, *The development of modern language teaching in secondary schools*, of 1969. The originality of this report lay in the fact that it was based on a survey of the opinions of teachers and is therefore practical and sceptical in outlook, especially in connection with teaching to all pupils.

Finally, one must mention the Joint Council of Language Associations report on *Conditions and facilities necessary for the efficient functioning of languages departments in secondary schools*, presented to the JCLA conference at Nottingham, December 1971. This goes right to the heart of the matter. It differentiates well between the relative skills required according to ability and acknowledges that there has to be great diversity of aims and methods. A major programme of in-service training is proposed, to prepare all teachers for the new situation, while research projects are recommended, aimed, amongst other things, at discovering the ability range over which modern languages can profitably be taught.

Modern languages and the less able pupil

One of the most important documents to emerge on the question of teaching languages across the ability range was produced by the Scottish Education Department in 1970, *Modern languages and the less able pupil*. It contains a feast of sound ideas, solid principles and practical suggestions. Its introduction stresses that the teacher of modern languages needs to face up to the new situation for which he may not have been trained and which will demand a high degree of pedagogical skill. The key question is also posed — is it worthwhile to make a great effort for such modest returns? Defining the less able pupils as those unable to sit SCE examinations in a foreign language, the report stresses that these pupils will only be assessed as such after an initial period of study with their contemporaries, and will nevertheless themselves have a wide range of linguistic ability. Emphasis is placed upon the attitude of the teacher, which is vital in encouraging success. Modification of expectations will be needed, suitable materials will have to be prepared, the work will have to be made interesting and enjoyable.

Methods and materials in practice

Rooms and equipment

In my own school, we are fortunate in several respects, possessing most of the requirements considered essential — in staff, in accommodation, materials, equipment, time allocation. We have a set of adjacent rooms set aside for French teaching, two of these equipped with good quality tape-recorders with extension speakers, and filmstrip projectors. There is also a record player for our own use and a radio with facilities for recording BBC broadcasts directly. Near to the main teaching room we have a lecture theatre seating several forms at once and equipped with a sound film projector and with television. There is no language laboratory.

Organisation

The number of staff available enables us to use a block-timetable system, with two or three forms taking French at any one time. For the first three years, French is taught right across the year, in five or six forms according to the size of the intake. The time allocation is four 40 minute periods a week, which will become five of 35 minutes next year. A certain amount of versatility in organisation is made possible by this block-timetable system, the number of staff and the variety of materials. At present, we have unstreamed classes in the first term of the first year, using the same course with all classes, emphasising its audio-visual elements rather than the printed material. At the end of the first term a test is devised to help us separate the pupils in each unstreamed form into three sets, labelled (for our own convenience only) 'A', 'B', 'C'. Earlier performance is also taken into consideration for this classification. From 1972 onwards, we shall retain unstreamed classes throughout the first year, thereby sacrificing speed of progress (with the more able) to stability of achievement.

This division into sets continues until the end of the third year, with a flexible promotion and demotion process throughout, when an option system then operates in all subjects. In the fourth and fifth years, there are two groups, one preparing for the CSE the other for GCE 'O' level, reducing the original 120 pupils to between 40 and 50 — a substantial loss. We have arranged the sets to give fairly large numbers in the able groups, with fewer in the 'B' sets and quite small numbers in the 'C' sets.

The 'A' and 'B' sets continue with the main audio-visual course until they reach the end of the examination year as GCE or CSE groups. With the 'C' sets there is a fresh start, with the primary school course, at the beginning of the winter term in the first year, lasting through until the end of the second year, when the age of the pupils then demands that they use more mature materials and their flagging interest requires that they make a fresh start. Consequently they are introduced to a series of well-known language magazines with accompanying records for their third year. Some are incorporated into the CSE group in the fourth year, others choose another subject.

Changes in this system will take place from 1972 onwards, when an

attempt will be made to create courses lasting five years for the three levels of ability — GCE, CSE, non-examination. The materials for the third level will probably be obtained commercially with the aim of diverting the course to a study of French life, geography and history.

However, a certain amount of home-brewed material will be used — duplicated worksheets to accompany the language magazines, cyclostyled maps for the study of geography, posters, collages, pictures; and more will be necessary as the course widens.

Methods

In terms of method, the lower the level of the class the more versatile one has to be. With the 'A' sets, from the first year onwards, a fair pace is maintained, with lots of choral work as well as individual contributions, conventional homework and tests. However, with the 'B' and 'C' sets, less attempt is made to pull along the group in unison, more allowance is made for individual progress and work within small groups. Pupils are allowed, for part of the time, to work at their own rate, either alone or in a group, or with the teacher, who circulates advising and helping. (Group work is practised with the 'A' groups but not necessarily for the same reasons.) Movement about the classroom and directed activities are essential at this stage. The rôle of the teacher has to be modified, he must be less obtrusive, less formal, dealing with problems and queries as they arise. In fact, the psychologically critical pupil-teacher situation is at the heart of these methods. For some of us it would be easy to receive a class with a series of abrupt commands and greetings — *'Levez-vous, tout le monde! Bonjour! Comment allez-vous? Asseyez-vous! On commence!'*, and then begin a strictly controlled lesson, with each contribution by the pupils prompted by a snap of the fingers, a gesture, a brief command, alternating solo and mass contributions like the strictest orchestral conductor. (One is reminded of the English lesson conducted by Simone Signoret in Clouzot's film, *Les diaboliques*.) Concentration is kept up to the highest pitch, all pupils progress at the same rate, the teacher's rôle is strictly defined, all activities stemming from him. On the other hand, the ability to get on with children as though one were an uncle or father (some pupils give away this modified relationship by inadvertantly referring to you as 'Dad'!), especially for those children who lack a loving and stable relationship at home, is essential for these methods and these pupils. Sympathy and understanding of their problems in dealing with the subject are the primary requirements, even if a certain apparent lack of order results.

The pupils

What are the pupils like? What is their background? They have the widest range of ability, with however a much narrower socio-economic range. The social balance of the school population is weighed down heavily at the lower end, with the majority of the pupils coming from two large housing estates built specially for miners and their families who moved from other parts of the country, especially Scotland and the North-East. There are many cases of deprivation, there are some cases of disturbed and difficult pupils tending towards violence, though the situation in this respect has

improved considerably over the last few years and is infinitely superior to that in some urban schools today. It is quite easy to get on with the majority of pupils, and the school organisation tending towards small tutor-groups (forms) aids in this.

Classes in action

The following are examples of these principles in action :

A third year 'A' set, following the main audio-visual course, having reached the half-way stage of part two. The class is composed of two dozen pupils, mainly girls, with quite a range of ability and competence (some are future 'A' level students, others CSE candidates). When beginning a new lesson in the course, the class will work together as a unit, with keen concentration, while I introduce the new material via the filmstrip. I do not shirk using English to ensure that the content of each frame is grasped. Then there follows a brief introduction in French to the events portrayed in the filmstrip, with the pupils answering questions on facts already known, phrased in the simplest terms. The tape-recording is next used, either with the filmstrip or with the printed dialogue and illustrations in the textbook. Homework is then set, requiring detailed study of the printed dialogue or the answering of a set of French questions based on the situation.

So far, work has been carried out with the class making its contribution as a whole, certain individuals inevitably standing out, and progress strictly controlled by the teacher. At this point, further consolidation of the new structures and vocabulary can be made, again with the whole group in unison, or the class can divide itself into the small groups already created — five groups of five each with a leader. Their task would be to deal with the dialogue as a play, the group leader allocating rôles, then they would pass on to a question and answer exercise based on the material. I would circulate, unobtrusively, listening in, asking questions, settling disputes. This method gives everyone a chance to speak in French for a lot of the time. Work with the whole class and work within the small groups will alternate as the new material is introduced, explained, practised, developed, tested. There are no problems of order or behaviour, a good atmosphere prevails. The furniture is arranged so as to be easily adaptable to the varying situation.

With a second year 'B' set, having reached the final stages of Book I of the same course, a similar method is employed. However, here the range of ability and competence is much wider, with many pupils of low intelligence, and some children in the group having great difficulty in making the necessary linguistic deductions and associations and finding serious problems with written accuracy.

New material is introduced to the whole class via filmstrips and tape. This particular class, rather 'junior' in its attitude, is difficult to contain within the normally accepted bounds of order, many children in it needing to call out answers and questions and to repeat what they hear, in a spontaneous and noisy way. This is a situation difficult to accept, tricky to handle, but

senseless to discourage. Group work is even more essential with pupils of this character and ability, but is more difficult to control and more difficult to feed with material. More detailed instructions are needed, more visuals are required, a greater variety of texts has to be prepared — flashcards are often issued to groups to provide the necessary stimulus.

A small fourth year GCE set is able to progress very successfully when split into groups, where the really able can bring on the others — again there is a wide range of ability and competence. The amount of material consumed in a single lesson by this method can be quite spectacular, with the course material lending itself to the process by providing a wide variety of exercises and dialogues. Sometimes these groups are allowed access to the tape-recorder to work with dialogues and structure drills for part of the time.

A final example, to complete the ability range, is that of a third year 'C' set containing only 15 pupils. A formal division into groups has not been considered necessary, because of frequent absences and because most of these pupils prefer to work individually. The materials used are language magazines and accompanying records, with work sheets based on the text of the magazines. Serious problems of comprehension are encountered even with material of this kind and a lot of explanation in English is always necessary.

The material is divided into sections and introduced first in English, then approached through the record, with reading aloud and questions on vocabulary and content. This particular item would then be dealt with using blackboard exercises or work sheets usually involving answering questions or inserting missing words into a modified version of the original text. At this point, the pupils like to work individually and compete quite keenly in speed and accuracy. I circulate among them, correcting and helping. No attempt is made to compel them to sit in specified places, some may also want to move about and look at the maps, posters, collages and diagrams on the walls. This particular group made the collages from souvenirs I collected in France last summer.

A few of the children in this group are disturbed and fretful and have to be handled sympathetically and not compelled to work at a particular task if they prefer to do something else (magazines, simple readers and other materials are always at hand). As with each other class, several natural leaders have emerged, one in particular — a boy who struggled in an 'A' set last year. The relationship is friendly and informal; for example, when the tape-recorder or record player is being used, the pupils themselves insist on working it. Most of them also crave to take an active part in the little plays based on the magazine dialogues.

Linear progress, in the accepted sense, is not possible with these pupils, but they find the experience of learning French a valuable and stimulating one, and we enjoy each other's company. Some of the girls in the group have had their own idea to prepare a 'project' on French history using magazines and books from home, supplemented by material of mine.

In the first year, group work is not attempted, but plays, activities, games and other informal work is carried out.

Materials

There has been a steady build-up of materials, and we have a generous annual allowance to enable us to add to our store. We now have most stages of a well-known audio-visual course (with duplicate sets of tapes and strips in the early stages), a primary school course with tapes and other aids used with slower learners in the early stages, a collection of tape-recordings, language magazines and accompanying records, and a steadily increasing collection of readers ranging from the elementary to Ordinary level standard (there will be no 'A' level course until 1974). We create a certain amount of our own material, we also keep a collection of English and French magazines for reading and as a supply of pictures to illustrate items in the pupils' exercise books. In addition, pupils bring toys, model vehicles, toy animals and dolls, which are always successful in making 'real' a particular subject.

Last year we followed the television series, *Le butin de Colombert*, with the whole range of third year classes, even though it presented considerable difficulties for many. This year we have programmed the *Toute la bande* film series through the year, with all second, third and fourth year classes, supplying our own follow-up material in the shape of printed questions.

A key question is how much language can be absorbed by the pupils of less ability and how long will they retain what they learn. This will vary from class to class, from pupil to pupil — some must be considered as making little progress in this respect, being unable to produce, either from memory or from the tape or printed page, an accurate version of a French phrase or sentence, even after repeated exposure to it. However, other pupils in the 'C' sets have considerable oral facility. The amount of English needed with these groups is quite large, for explanations, instructions, translations of the original text. However, French itself is not entirely abandoned to allow one to pass over completely to background work in English.

There is still obviously a long way to go, and complacency at this stage would be fatal. We are having difficulty in arranging a group visit to France next summer: only one senior pupil has been able to take part in the Birmingham/Poitiers pupil exchange scheme (a most valuable and inexpensive scheme), and there has been no attempt so far to encourage contact with French children via correspondence. We are in a low-income area, particularly hard-hit by the coal miners' strike, where travel abroad is a rarity. Our teaching is still restricted to French, though German will be introduced in 1973.

To take a broader view, I would conclude that there is little point in condemning the bad effects of the wider spread of modern language teaching in schools if little attempt has so far been made to provide the most vital single requirement — adequate numbers of appropriately trained teachers.

The examinations have expanded, the publishers have never provided so much varied material. Does one retreat in face of the difficulties or attempt to solve the problem? There is no point in simply claiming that the weaker pupil is not up to language learning and should therefore be denied the opportunity.

Bibliography — in chronological order

Modern languages in the secondary modern school. Modern Language Association, 1951.

Modern languages. Ministry of Education Pamphlet No. 29, 1956.

Half our future. Ministry of Education, 1963.

'Current tendencies in the teaching of modern languages'. P. H. Hoy. *Modern Languages,* March 1963.

'Unsolved problems in language teaching'. W. R. Fraser. *Modern Languages,* December 1963.

'On being seen and not heard'. E. M. Wilkinson. *Modern Languages,* March 1964.

'Les langues non-scolaires'. George Taylor. *Modern Languages,* March 1966.

'Games in the language lesson'. J. R. Jump. *Modern Languages,* June 1966.

French in the primary school. The Schools Council, 1966.

'The 11+ and 13+ age groups in modern language teaching'. D. C. Riddy. *Modern Languages,* March 1967.

'The middle school in 1967'. L. K. Upton. *Modern Languages,* March 1967.

'The middle stages of the modern language course'. E. A. Greatwood. *Modern Languages,* December 1967.

The new pattern of language teaching. D. H. Harding. Longman, 1967.

'The way ahead in language learning and teaching'. D. C. Riddy. *Modern Languages,* March 1968.

'The impact of primary foreign language teaching in secondary schools'. I. Hindmarsh. *Modern Languages,* March 1968.

'Post-primary French'. M. J. Moore-Rinvolucri. *Modern Languages,* September 1968.

'The psychology of language learning and audio-visual techniques'. L. R. Cole. *Modern Languages,* December 1968.

'Streams, sets or mixed ability groups'. J. Partington. *Modern Languages,* September 1969.

Development of modern language teaching in secondary schools. Schools Council, 1969.

Modern languages and the less able pupil. Scottish Education Department, 1970.

French in the primary school. Clare Burstall. NFER, 1970.

'Standards in modern languages'. Letter to *The Times Educational Supplement*, 15 January 1971.

'Looking at languages — one man's view'. K. MacGowan. *The Times Educational Supplement*, 5 March 1971.

'Why learn modern languages?' Lord Evans. *Modern Languages*, March 1971.

'French from eight to eighteen : conference report'. *Modern Languages*, September 1971.

Teaching foreign languages to all pupils. CILT. (Select List 14.) May 1972.

— 7 —

Teaching a foreign language in the primary school

F. L. PENTY

I think we may begin by stating that teaching a foreign language in the primary school means teaching French, since with the odd exception French is the only foreign language being taught to children of primary school age.

I should like to deal with what I have to say in two main parts: the general, that is the overall problem as the administrator, and even the architect, as well as the teacher may see it, and the particular — the problems as they confront the teacher of French in his classroom. Since these two aspects overlap and are to some extent interdependent, they will, I am sure, interest every one concerned in the matter.

To start with the general aspect: Is a new definition of a primary school needed? In many areas, first and middle schools are being established, and it seems almost certain that LEA's will decide to encourage first schools to leave the subject alone, and let the middle schools start the teaching of French to children of eight or nine. For our purpose perhaps we could define primary children as those receiving their first three years' education in French, from eight or nine to eleven or twelve.

Do we teach French to *all* pupils? Yes — we must give every child the opportunity to learn French. Every teacher with a wide experience knows that some children of very modest, even poor attainment in almost all other subjects, perhaps because they are blessed with a good ear and an ability to imitate sounds coming from a tape recorder or from their teacher's lips, can make some progress in French. I do not say they will ever become 'A' level candidates, but they can and will learn to understand and speak simple French. But *all* pupils means very many children, and this means very many teachers, since there must be a daily lesson, even if it is short, say half an hour or even twenty minutes.

How many pupils will the typical French teacher have in his class or group? This is a vital question. With twenty or twenty-five a good teacher can, like a certain famous beverage, work wonders. But we know that classes

more often run to thirty-five and forty in the primary school, and if a sympathetic head teacher is willing to split these large groups, he has his other teachers to think of, and they are all conscious of large classes as they struggle with arithmetic, English, social studies and the rest.

I am not forgetting here that ideally the teacher is not a specialist, but is teaching the other subjects of the curriculum also, and nearly all his colleagues are teaching French part of the time. However, this happy state of affairs has not been reached yet, and will not, I think, be reached in the near future.

Here a new problem presents itself. We hear and read a great deal nowadays of the exciting work being done in our primary schools. Education is becoming child-centred, the pupil is to research and discover for himself, working often in a small group with other children, choosing perhaps what he wants to devote his time to. Classes, as we have come to know them, have no place in schooling of this kind, though of course the head teacher who puts these ideas into practice in his school may devote some of the time to formal or 'class' work. Now French is a sequential subject; a scheme must be followed, steady progress must be made as new vocabulary is learned and the present tense leads on to the future and the past tenses. It does not 'fit in' with this new conception of what the education of young children is all about. No child will discover for himself how to speak a foreign language, unless he lives for a time in the country concerned. He has to be taught it. Will French be looked on with disfavour in some quarters because of this?

As I write I am thinking of the 'open plan' school. The teacher of French cannot take his group of children into a classroom; there are no classrooms. He will be fortunate if his school has one or two small 'boxes', as they are now being called, since an open plan school is by definition a building with a few very large areas.

The teaching of French is certainly difficult in such surroundings, but it is not impossible, and the school, which will be a new one, will almost certainly be generously equipped with audio-visual aids of all kinds and an efficient black-out, for which the teacher will be most grateful. Perhaps by careful time-tabling he and his group can have their *petit coin* in the large learning area, away from other children. However, the school is likely to have the full number of pupils for which it was designed, and discovery methods and freedom mean a good deal of noise. Quiet corners are going to take some finding, and we are thinking in terms of a lesson for very child, every day. What is the answer, in a school of this kind? More than ever, generous staffing becomes a matter of the greatest importance, and without a sympathetic and helpful head teacher, little can be done. At the same time, we must remember that since the teaching of French to children in maintained schools began ten years ago, more and more people have accepted it as the sensible and right thing to do and there is now little opposition to it. Britain's entry into Europe will give a boost to language learning, and in this respect the teacher will be fortunate, especially since he will receive

official encouragement in his task.

Now to turn to the teacher in his classroom, or if his school is open plan, behind his screen. He will be using one of the audio-visual courses, and he will want his surroundings to be a reminder of France. He will have posters, not as easy to come by as they used to be. He may well have a French shop, with French packages: coffee, cheese, sugar, biscuits, or a display table with cigarette packets, card games, puzzles, paper bags, bus, railway and métro tickets, paper wrappings. There will probably be wall pictures for use in stimulating conversation and revising vocabulary. There may also be models the children have made, gramophone records or tapes of nursery rhymes, songs and short poems, as well as film strips illustrating nursery rhymes and fairy stories. The aim, with all this material, is to provide variety as much as to expose the children to the French language and French life. The material is easily available.

The last paragraph will probably have suggested the term I want to introduce now: motivation, the problem being to maintain the children's interest. In practical terms, what is this learning process leading to? The teacher hopes the children will want to visit France, and one day perhaps invite French children to their homes. A growing number of teachers are taking boys and girls of primary school age across the Channel, sometimes in term time, and one hopes that more LEA's will soon be helping financially to make this possible. Some do so already. I have myself taken parties of ten to eleven year olds to the seaside in France nearly every summer since 1963.

The teacher will also need space for his children to play games — the games French children play, with movement, speech and singing.

I have just written of providing variety. The teacher of young children knows that most of them are incapable of applying their minds for long to any one topic, and here his skill finds full scope. He knows when to stop, when enough is enough, when to change to some other form of activity. He can sense when the children's interest is going, when the blinds are coming down. If his class is a large one, his task is of course more difficult.

This is the time to sound a cautionary note about the audio-visual course, which will in all probability have exercises for practising the points of the lesson and drills for driving them home. These are valuable and necessary, but they must be used with care. One course, now I think largely superseded in junior schools but still in use in some secondary ones, has a long section in each lesson where the pupil repeats the material three times, often in long sentences. It is better to reduce this sort of exercise very drastically than to kill the children's interest and will to learn. After all, an AV aid is an aid to the teacher in supplementing his own material, in teaching the structure or phrase he wants his class to learn, and in providing a variety of voices in the foreign language.

Another difficulty which has to be overcome is to make sure that the children take as full a part in the lesson as possible. They must not always

be at the receiving end. The group will almost certainly be a mixed one, and the wise teacher will use them to teach *le garçon* and *la fillette, un enfant, deux enfants* and so on. He will have them moving about to illustrate verbs and prepositions: *Il ouvre la porte, elle est devant la table.* Soon the pupils will associate *un* with *le* and *une* with *la.* They will tell each other: *Mon tricot est blanc. Ma chemise est blanche.* As the weeks go by, the commonest words and expressions will be repeated time and time again, until their use becomes automatic, just as repetition of his own language teaches a very young child to learn it. The pupils begin to think in French, which is the teacher's chief aim; hence 'everything in French', though I think few experienced teachers would refuse to use English occasionally, say to explain in general terms what the lesson is going to be about, or if he is planning to introduce a new structure or a new use of a word.

Every teacher will think for himself of ways of involving his children in the learning of French. Simple plays, at first written by the teacher and later 'made up' by the pupils, perhaps a dramatisation of a fairy story; puppets and marionettes. These are a few suggestions.

The teacher who, in trying to overcome the problems inherent in large numbers asks the help of his head teacher, inspector or language adviser, will almost certainly be told: Let the children work in groups. In this way they can greet each other in French, practise questions and answers, play shops and families. The shy child who so often seems to escape his teacher's attention can have his say, and can become involved in what the class is doing.

I have given this problem much thought. I have used and use group methods in my own teaching and have come to the conclusion that we must do it, but we are making the best of a bad job. The shy child is still shy in his group, the non-speaker still does not speak, or at least not much, the 'pusher' is still the 'pusher', the trier still the trier. I hope our discussions will produce something fruitful on this point. I would say here to the teacher: Do not leave them talking away in their groups. Move constantly round among them, correcting and encouraging, especially encouraging. The better the teacher, in my opinion, the less urgent is the need for group work, always assuming numbers are not too large.

If groups, what about streaming? I think we can disregard this, as the practice finds less favour in education generally, and as the eleven plus examination is done away with. But because French is, as I said, essentially a sequential subject, after say two years some form of setting should be adopted, some way of separating the slower from the quicker learners. I know this is heresy in some quarters, for any subject, but I think that if we are going to give the abler children a real education in French we must find a way of helping them to make headway, at the same time helping the not-so-bright to progress at a slower pace.

Finally, what qualities in particular does the teacher need? I think

two. He must be able to speak French easily and fluently, though it need only be fairly simple French; he need not worry about the subjunctive or the French names of all the trees in the forest. Second, he must be a good teacher of young children — inventive, resourceful, and hardworking. His control must be sound, especially if he is to exploit movement about the room by the children, the playing of games and activities of many kinds.

— 8 —

Modern languages in a comprehensive school

DAME MARGARET MILES

In the session of 1954-55 Mayfield Comprehensive School was still a three-form entry selective 'grammar' school. There was very strong emphasis on languages and particularly on French. All the girls of course began French and the A form in the fourth year was selected on their skill in languages and was indeed called 'the language form', much to the disapproval of the mathematicians and scientists. In the fourth year Latin or German was added. However, in spite of this by no means all the girls took French at Ordinary level and those who did did not all pass. Another fact of history is that at that same time it was accepted more or less as a fact of life that pupils in secondary modern schools (the ex-elementary senior schools) did not take a foreign language.

In 1955-56 Mayfield became a fifteen-form entry comprehensive school, that is to say that the first years in 1955-56 numbered some 450 of whom only about 90, i.e. the equivalent of the previous school, were so-called grammar quality. The fifteen forms, a number mercifully later reduced to twelve, were banded in groups of three or four forms roughly speaking according to ability. We did, in the first year in response to the pressures of the time to protect the abler child, pick an A form, but we never did this again and the results were not very satisfactory. There was, however, the great question of what were we to do about the teaching of languages. We had a choice of three courses: we could have taken three forms, roughly the equivalent of the so-called grammar school girls, and let them do French which would have been the mixture much as before except that the 'others' would have been in the same school; secondly, we could have gone to the other extreme and said they were all in the secondary school and so should all have the chance of beginning a foreign language; or thirdly, we could expand the inherited pattern and extend the teaching of languages to six, or nine, or twelve, out of the fifteen forms. Obviously it would have been retrograde to have done the first thing and just kept the same number of girls doing French as previously, and we were reminded at the time of the large number of extremely

good girls who transferred into our sixth form and did do well, in many cases going on to universities, who had not had the opportunity of doing French up until 'O' level because they had been in secondary modern or central schools at that time. Possibly the second course, making everybody do it, would even then have been socially good and educationally desirable, but it was not really practical, because we had not got the sort of teachers needed nor any experience on which to base this kind of teaching. Still we decided it would be worth trying to extend the number of forms to about three-quarters of the intake and to try and get teachers who could both *teach,* and speak French — good teachers who were also good French speakers. In its day the extension of language teaching to three-quarters of the intake was fairly revolutionary. Even so, after a few years, about 1960 I think, the modern language staff themselves questioned this cut-off and said that having developed the technique for teaching a language to three-quarters of the ability range, was there any logical or educational reason for restricting it to that, and since then we have always taught a foreign language to all the girls in the first years and usually in the first three.

These changes, of course, have involved the use of audio-visual oral/aural methods and have indeed been part of the revolution in language teaching which has been taking place over a fairly wide field. In about 1960 we were given a language laboratory, but again without much educational preparation for it, we had to learn the techniques ourselves and the staff developed their own methods, made their tapes, arranged visits to existing language laboratories which were then mostly in industrial and commercial firms or the occasional technical college. It was a very difficult time; not only did we not have enough help with teaching methods and training but there were no suitable arrangements for maintenance and renewal, with the result that the language laboratory is now worn out and we are awaiting a policy decision about renewal.

I have given a rather bald outline of how we came to teach the whole range of ability, which I must stress is very wide indeed at Mayfield — we have some extremely able children and we also have a few who do find difficulty with the simple skills.

At the same time that these general developments had been taking place we have also expanded the study of languages from just French and a classical language with a bit of German. First we pioneered an oral course in German for the less able from the very beginning, from 1955; we have experimented with Russian as a first foreign language, for two successive years, and one set has now just gone through to the seventh year. We tried Italian and Spanish as alternatives to French, we have tried the Nuffield courses, and, as I have already mentioned, many of the other aids, and we have introduced the Cambridge Nuffield Classics project. All this language-teaching revolution has been happening against a constantly changing background in the school, because everybody is now realising that going comprehensive, that is to say being reorganised on comprehensive lines, is only the beginning of the development of comprehensive education and during the

years since we went comprehensive we have been constantly developing and changing our organisational pattern and of course curriculum pattern as well. For instance we have moved over to complete non-streaming in the first three years, gradually year by year[1]; we have introduced the CSE with several Mode III Syllabuses; there has been a considerable change in teaching methods and in the personal relationships between pupils and teachers, which are bound to accompany the more informal methods of teaching which have been introduced. But I haven't stressed why, with all the changing and experimentation that has gone on, we have persisted in languages for all. This was not an experiment on which we have wanted to go back, and we have persisted not because it is non-divisive or egalitarian but because we believe that the study of languages is a valuable educational experience for everybody and that the staff have wanted to do it.

I think that apart from the linguistic and intellectual satisfaction which anybody gets through realising that people do speak in different ways, there is also an emotional experience which is of benefit and which links up with study of international affairs and attitudes. I therefore believe that the teaching of foreign languages is a very essential part of secondary education but of course it raises all sorts of questions. Which languages? We would say all or as many as possible; don't let us think that 'modern languages' equals, shall we say, French. Secondly, to what level? We would think that a modern comprehensive school must teach languages to a great variety of levels, from the university scholarship level to the simple phrases for going on holiday or just being able to name a few familiar things in other languages. And to do all languages at different levels implies of course that different speeds, different methods, different techniques, must be used for the different purposes, and there is a place in the teaching of languages in schools for direct method, for oral/aural method, for oral method, for *par l'objet* method, for games, and so on. And indeed we must recognise that there are individual needs, children who have perhaps a home language that they want to keep up and we need to have resources — teaching machines, tapes, and so on — for individual foreigners and odd languages so that people need not be frustrated from pursuing their own language needs. We are, in the big cities and indeed in most parts of Britain now, a multiracial and multinational society and the language needs are very wide indeed.

All this involves practical provision for an opportunity to: read (class library books, classic and modern authors); speak (with the help of *assistants* in the school, exchanges and visits abroad); hear (using language laboratory tapes, and again through *assistants* and exchanges); understand — not only the language, but also the culture and way of life of the country which speaks the language. And from the middle school upwards there should be opportunity to relate language skills to secondary skills such as those in catering, commerce, design and so on. Other practical needs follow from all

[1] I should say that in most cases after the first year, the language forms are 'set' that is to say that three or four parallel forms are grouped together and redivided into four or five divisions arranged according to ability in the particular language.

this, such as first the concentration of the teaching of languages in one area of the school where aids can be easily accessible. This involves good storage and adequate security. It emphasises the need for technical and secretarial assistance and indeed for a versatile staff among whom will be found people who can do the academic and university entrance work as well as those who can teach languages to less able pupils, and who have an interest in organising travel and exchanges. All these new methods and activities are very expensive and adequate financial provision and budgeting are the *sine qua non*.

— 9 —

Summary of discussions and general conclusions

A. SPICER

Is a foreign language for all desirable? practicable?

It was generally agreed that socially (and politically) it would be highly desirable to offer a foreign language to all. Some doubts were expressed about the educational justification of foreign language courses for the lowest ability children. Most of the participants felt, however, that viable educational aims could be established though they would need to be carefully thought out and specified and not be merely a watered down version of those judged to be suitable for the 'academic' pupil.

Most objections were based on difficulties arising from the shortage of suitable teachers and from problems of school organisation. A minority, however, felt that foreign language courses for the low ability children would have little or no surrender value and that inevitably the intellectual demands of any language course would be too great for these children.

Is there a shortage of teachers of French?

The general opinion was that there is indeed already a shortage at both primary and lower secondary levels. More statistical information from the DES and the LEAs was generally felt to be an urgent planning requirement. Opinion was almost equally divided between those who felt that expansion of foreign language teaching down the age range and across the ability range should proceed slowly and in parallel with the increasing output of teachers from both colleges and university education departments, and those who felt that the present rate of expansion could be continued or even accelerated by more economical deployment of existing teachers and more in-service training. A more flexible approach to the problems of class organisation, including the possibility of teaching larger groups for some aspects would also help to overcome staff shortage.

What are the most appropriate objectives for foreign language courses for the lower ability children?

The main need was judged to be the definition of objectives at each level. Most people considered that these could properly be limited to comprehension of the spoken and written language and to a study in a European

context of the foreign culture and way of life. A minority felt strongly that writing at an elementary level could also be included and that similarly a 'survival' course in the spoken language enabling them to communicate at a simple level in everyday situations would also be practical for many of these pupils.

What are the most effective teaching strategies?

This subject produced the widest disagreements. Some considered that an 'intellectual' approach, possiby via the mother tongue, to the problems of grammatical competence (mastery of patterns) was essential and inevitable. Others considered that exposure to meaningful stretches of the language in a context of situation would be largely sufficient. Others again felt that a judicious mixture of presentation, repetition and contextualised drills would provide the answer.

All agreed that the motivation of both pupil and teacher was of paramount importance. In connection with motivation, the suggestion was made that schools should provide a series of graded tests of minimum achievement at various levels which pupils could take as and when they felt able to do so.

What is the optimum starting age?

Although agreeing that, when adequate teaching and other facilities were available, French (or another language) could profitably be undertaken in the primary school, some people felt that for the least able who had not had this opportunity in the primary school, a start later than eleven or twelve in the secondary school might produce better results.

At what age/stage should opting out of foreign language courses be permitted?

The general opinion was that foreign language courses should normally be compulsory for the first two years in the secondary school but that pupils who had had two or three years of primary school French might be allowed to opt out after one year. It was generally agreed that both parents and pupils should be consulted and that, where pupils had not achieved much success in the foreign language but wished to continue, consideration should be given to providing non-examination courses in the third and subsequent years.

Summary of main points of agreement

1. A foreign language should be offered to all pupils in both primary and secondary schools whenever adequate staffing is available.
2. In primary schools and for the first one or two years of secondary school the foreign language course should be compulsory, but in consultation with parents and pupils it should thereafter be optional and in appropriate cases the course should be non-examinable.
3. Objectives for the different ability levels should be defined as precisely as possible and should be determined by reference to pupils' capabilities, in-

terests and needs. Account should also be taken of the possibility of linking the course to a general introduction to language, to English teaching and to the teaching of other subjects, perhaps in the context of European studies.

4. Methods of teaching should similarly be determined, account being taken of the teachers' capabilities and wishes.

5. Teaching in mixed ability groups should be encouraged, that is teachers who feel able to undertake this kind of teaching and who enjoy doing it should be supported; on the other hand teachers who neither want it nor feel able to undertake it should not be coerced. Where necessary, for example in a comprehensive school, a special case for teaching foreign languages in homogeneous groups should be made.

6. Teacher training, both initial and in-service should include preparation for teaching lower ability children and mixed ability classes, especially the former.

7. The present shortage of foreign language teachers in both primary and secondary schools is likely to increase and all possible steps should be taken to improve the quantity and quality of the supply from colleges, university education departments and in-service courses.

8. In spite of the excellent and detailed papers presented at this Conference (and on previous occasions) there is still a need for a clear and reasoned statement of the case for foreign language teaching at all levels which would set out the benefits likely to accrue from such teaching in a form capable of convincing administrators and colleagues in other disciplines.

Language teachers should also provide clearer definitions of what constitutes a foreign language course and (for administrators) an order of priorities for the immediate future.

General recommendations

1. More statistical information should be sought from the DES and LEAs about teacher supply and demand. This should include statistical 'models' of the type: if *x* pupils are to be taught a foreign language then *y* teachers will be required (a) at this level and (b) at that.

2. More attention should be paid in initial and in-service training to subject methodology, especially with regard to needs of teachers of lower ability children.

3. Research should be encouraged into such topics as: the effectiveness of mixed ability group teaching as compared with homogeneous group teaching; achievement of pupils of lower ability; what learning a foreign language really entails.

4. Experiments should be encouraged in different forms of organisation of foreign language teaching, for instance: team teaching; comparisons between intensive and extensive courses at different stages; foreign language teaching in the context of European studies.

APPENDIX 1

A note on language skills

C. V. JAMES

I should like to support Mr. Salter's plea for some rethinking about language skills — especially comprehension — and suggest that this topic is relevant to certain others that have occupied much of the discussion, particularly the problems of *which* language to teach to *whom*.

Obviously the four major skills are so inter-related that to discuss them separately is to some extent artificial; but equally obviously we have to discuss them separately if we are to discuss them at all. What we tend to do, it seems to me, is to arrange them in a hierarchy which is really rather arbitrary and then to adapt all our procedures to the demands of that hierarchy. Within such an arrangement we neglect the two *comprehensional* skills, considering them somehow inferior to the skills involving creative production of the language. This attitude is reflected, for example, in our terminology, in which — even in Schools Council parlance — the comprehensional skills are said to be *receptive* or *passive*, even though it is easily demonstrated that they are not in fact receptive but *perceptive*, representing not passive states but exceedingly *active* processes. Such an attitude then leads us further astray, so that we may use oral techniques, for example, not to improve comprehension but only to force our pupils to speak. We confuse the means with the end.

I am always a little unhappy when people say that one language is 'more difficult' or 'easier' than another. I am never quite sure what they mean. But I do think it demonstrable that different foreign languages present the native English-speaker with different problems, and that these problems are most easily discerned and analysed in terms of skills. The native English-speaker will acquire certain skills with greater or lesser difficulty in one foreign language than in another, and if this is taken properly into account we may find ourselves setting out to teach, for instance, different skills in French from those we teach in German to the same pupils; or, if we wish to teach only certain skills, we may find it wise to concentrate on French for one set of pupils but on German for another, and so on. Perhaps, as an extreme example, we should set out to teach our most able pupils to speak French and our least able pupils to understand German . . .

Certainly it is hardly meaningful to talk about French or German

without defining not only which skills we are concerned with but in which areas of language, which registers. And here Mr. Salter has unwittingly given us a splendid example : he spoke of a class of 'slow learners' who managed to glean certain data from a French broadcast despite the fact that it was presented in the form of a conventional football commentary, but I suggest that they succeeded not *despite* the form of the broadcast but *because* of it. So to our distinction of skills we can also add a distinction of registers, and in any two languages neither combination need necessarily coincide.

If all these factors are considered, it may well be that the problem of teaching languages right across the ability range may not seem quite so formidable. Almost certainly we shall find a need to increase the quantity of German taught, rather than French. And we might then go some way toward solving the problem of the shortage of teachers of French by discontinuing the artificial creation of that problem !

APPENDIX 2

Modern languages: a basic part of the curriculum

G. VARNAVA

Despite general and convincing efforts to contain the discussion within the limits of academic considerations, 'a foreign language to all pupils and across the ability range' is becoming a reality for socially and politically inspired reasons. That the reality is seen to have established itself in practice, uncomfortably preceding sound, proven theory, accounts for the teachers' disquiet and observers' recommended caution. Whereas, generally, most relevance is afforded to such terms as 'intelligence', 'ability', 'progress', 'standards' and 'achievement', the underlying concern is for equality of opportunity and freedom of choice: a concern felt at a time when de-schooling, free-schooling and the abolition of examinations have a not-too-distant appeal.

Where modern languages are concerned, two comprehensive principles : equality of opportunity and the development of individual aptitudes, have resulted in conflicting views. Although the former suggests a common curriculum for pupils of the whole ability range, the latter argues some process of selection. Departmental setting has been the most frequent compromise. 'Academic' and 'non-academic' groups are quickly formed and easily associated with 'grammar' and 'non-grammar' types of education. With such a division, modern languages have served as a convenient but unfortunate point of reference in the assessment of individual pupils. However, modern languages are, in fact, losing the 'specialist subject' image, and are being accepted as a basic part of the curriculum, thereby complying with the common demands of general organisation.

The present teaching problem may be seen as the result of various attempts to establish an organisational pattern suited to the apparent or assumed intellectual demands of the subject : selection (and, thereby, exclusion); streaming; banding; setting; mixed ability grouping. Where modern languages are accepted as a 'basic' subject, however, these various systems and the 'special' problems of organisation may be resolved. The offer of a foreign language to all pupils can be fully justified both in economic and pedagogical terms : the EEC, travel, cultural value are used as justification and provide incentive for learning but there exists also a general awareness of the basic

usefulness of experience or knowledge of a foreign language. At the lowest point in the ability range particularly, considerable benefit can be derived from the appreciation of forms of communication other than that of the mother tongue and from the valuable experience gained through the learning process. The high content of oral work, and elementary grammar training have a considerable general educational value.

The reasons that have brought about the increase in demand for modern language teaching also put in question the validity of the monopoly of French as the first foreign language. The cost-effectiveness of other languages might most usefully be calculated. If we insist that every pupil should learn a language, we should ensure that as much as possible of that language is learnt in the period of time devoted to it. If a pupil is obliged to continue a course for three years, he may reach further, for example, in Spanish or German than in French. Beyond that point, an option scheme would operate, allowing for ending or continuing the language, or beginning another.

Serious problems arise where all pupils in a streamed situation learn a foreign language. The 'sink' that rapidly develops usually creates an impossible teaching situation in which learning increasingly depends on a daily sprinkling of more or less relevant information rather than on assessable linguistic progress. Although language teachers seek this progress, a low expectancy level is soon established for low ability groups. Setting also produces its own under-achievement, even though the unfortunate 'dregs' may succeed elsewhere. A saturation-point is soon, and most obviously, reached by some pupils within two years of a language course.

With the acceptance of a modern language as part of a common curriculum, mixed ability grouping finds sound justification: the ethos of the comprehensive system would seem to demand it; the failure of the eleven plus process of selection hardly need be introduced into the secondary school; streaming is generally erratic and misleading and either assumes that a pupil's assessed ability remains unchanged, or hinders potential improvement by the working conditions it creates. Setting by subjects makes for insecurity and instability for the pupil in the early secondary school years when these are created by too-frequent change and movement of groups. Both streaming and setting lead to difficulties in teaching where achievement is considered the only justification for participating in the process of learning a language. Large areas of mixed ability teaching may already exist quite commonly: in practical subjects, options and certain basic parts of the curriculum, and to impose an overall selective system based on academic criteria alone, when physical, creative and practical success may be equally desirable or valid, seems particularly unjust.

Quite evidently, the demands of mixed ability teaching can only be met by teachers who give their support and energy. The right attitudes to the problem and willingness to combine the functions of instructor with those of tutor are of first importance. Devising an appropriate syllabus and a valid system of assessment, and the preparation of suitable materials, are essentials

when a change to mixed ability teaching is planned. A good teacher/class relationship and continuity of teacher are doubly important if the unification of a mixed group is to be achieved.

The aim of promoting individual development to maximum capacity embodies the danger of progressive in-class streaming. Enough common ground should be included in classwork to prevent any widening of the initially estimated ability range, and to guarantee conditions for regular assessment. Progress of the group as well as the individual is a worthwhile social aim; in economic terms : the greatest total gain rather than the highest individual achievement.

An audio-visual course, with teaching techniques based on a natural rather than a scholastic process of language learning, should be used to allow the individual pupil to extract information at his own level of comprehension. Provided that the value normally attributed to writing is reduced in favour of the spoken word and increased comprehension, and that *les éléments extra-verbaux* are fully exploited, low ability pupils may still achieve conscious and measurable progress.

The length of a compulsory course in a foreign language for all pupils might well be determined by the school curriculum at the point where an option scheme is introduced. If setting has begun before this, the lower groups could be engaged in a lesser proportion of linguistic work and a greater quantity of 'background studies'.

APPENDIX 3

Current research

This list of research in progress is extracted from *Language and language teaching: current research in Britain,* to be published later this year by Longman, and the extracts are reproduced here by permission of Longman. The publication will provide a rather fuller description of these and other projects than it is possible to set out here; these entries can be traced in the book by their serial numbers.

510 Professor J. N. Britton, University of London Institute of Education, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HS. *Associates:* Miss N. C. Martin, director of phase II, and 6 other associates. *Sponsor:* Schools Council. *The written language of 11-18 year olds and writing across the secondary curriculum.* (Fuller descriptions of both phases available from Schools Council Information Centre.)

618 Miss F. I. Calvert, Department of Education, University of Durham, 48 Old Elvet, Durham. *Associates:* J. E. Phorson, J. W. Morton, Mrs. J. Wynn. *Investigation into problems involved in teaching reading in French to primary school children after an oral course.* (Preparation of theses for degree of MEd.)

727 Mrs. C. Burstall, National Foundation for Educational Research, 79 Wimpole Street, London W1M 8EA. *Associates:* 2 research assistants, 2 technical assistants. *Sponsors:* Department of Education and Science *and* Schools Council. *The French project: an investigation into the teaching of French in primary schools. (See also* no. 902, and Appendix 4; fuller description of the project available from Schools Council Information Centre.)

837 R. W. Rutherford, University of York, 86 Micklegate, York YO1 1JZ. *Associates:* Mrs. M. E. A. Freeth, Miss E. S. Mercer, R. Sala. *Sponsor:* Nuffield Foundation, through former Committee on Research and Development in Modern Languages. *Survey of the spoken language of children aged 13-16.* The survey is mainly of spoken English, but also includes French, German and Spanish spoken by 15 and 16 year olds. (List of publications available from Schools Council Modern Languages Project, 86 Micklegate, York YO1 1JZ.)

851 D. R. Barnes, Institute of Education, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT. *Language and learning in secondary classrooms.* (*See* Douglas Barnes and others: *Language, the learner and the school.* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1969, p. 11-77.)

895 W. S. Harpin, School of Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD. *Associates:* Miss H. M. Berry, Miss E. H. Loudon and 3 other associates. *Sponsor:* Social Science Research Council. *An investigation of the social and educational influences on children's acquisition of grammar.*

896 W. S. Harpin, School of Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RL. *An analysis of the variability of structures in children's personal writing in relation to changes in the stimulus situation.*

902 Mrs. C. Burstall, National Foundation for Educational Research, 79 Wimpole Street, London W1M 8EA. *Associates:* 1 research assistant, 1 technical assistant. *Sponsor:* Schools Council. *The third cohort study.* An extension of the evaluation of the teaching of French in primary schools (*see* no. 727) to a third year-group of pupils.

905 Miss M. T. Coutin-Boppe, Department of Linguistics, University of Edinburgh, Adam Ferguson Building, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LL. *An integrated approach to in-service training courses for primary teachers.* This investigation is being carried out in the context of large-scale programmes with special reference to the French language programme in Edinburgh primary schools. (*See NALA: Journal of the National Association of Language Advisers,* vol. 1 no. 2, 1970, p. 73-5.)

960 E. C. Wragg, Department of Education, University of Exeter, Thornlea, New North Road, Exeter EX4 4JZ. *Sponsor:* Social Science Research Council. *Analysis of verbal classroom interaction between teachers and children (including a special study of foreign language teachers).* (For degree of PhD.)

964 Mrs. F. P. Dimson, Language Research Centre, Birkbeck College, 15-16 Rathbone Place, London W1P 1DF (University of London). *Associates:* Miss L. A. Mullineaux, Dr. M. H. A. Blanc, supervisors. *Sponsor:* Department of Education and Science, through former Committee on Research and Development in Modern Languages (until 1971). *Sociolinguistic background and second language learning.* An investigation to explore the relationship between performance in native (English) language and progress during the first year of learning French (between 8 and 10). (For degree of PhD.)

989 G. W. Riddell, Craigie College of Education, Ayr. *Associates:* H. M. Ramsay, J. C. Brown and 4 other associates, with headmaster and staff of Newton Park School, Ayr. *Sponsor:* Scottish Education Department. *Primary school language project.* The aim is to explore what happens when children's work in language (mother tongue) is done in centres of interest rather than out of textbooks.

991 J. B. Skull, Swansea College of Education, Townhill Road, Cockett, Swansea SA2 OUT. (Research at: Department of Education, University College of Swansea (University of Wales). *A study of function in spoken language: a linguistic analysis of the monologue form of speech when used for specific purposes by adults and pupils of 15-16 years of age.*

994 V. J. Cook, Department of Arts and Modern Languages, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS. *The linguistic and psychological bases of language teaching* . . . evaluation of recent work . . . construction and testing of teaching materials . . . (Book in preparation.)

1014 Dr. Jasmine Dawkins, Bingley College of Education, Bingley, Yorkshire BD16 4AR. *Associate:* Mrs. M. Kellermann. *Development of supplementary materials and teaching aids in French* . . . designed for use in conjunction with the Nuffield/Schools Council French course (*En Avant*) . . . .

1119 D. Cracknell, Department of Education, University of Durham, 48 Old Elvet, Durham. *The reaction of first-year secondary pupils to their primary school French.* (For degree of MEd.)

1125 Mrs A. M. Fessler, Child Development Research Unit, Department of Psychology, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD. *Associate:* Dr. J. Newson, supervisor. *Sponsor:* Nuffield Foundation. *The development of linguistic skills in primary school children with special reference to their home environment.* (For degree of PhD.)

1132 P. O. Hutchings, 5 Bayley Close, Uppingham, Rutland. (Research at: School of Education, University of Leicester.) *Associate:* J. A. Jerman, supervisor. *An enquiry into pupil and senior staff attitudes to the language laboratory in schools in the east midlands.* (For degree of MEd.)

1138 Dr. W. D. Halls, Department of Educational Studies, University of Oxford, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY. *Associate:* Mrs. J. Marshall. *Sponsor:* Council of Europe. *A study of the principles and*

aims of curriculum development in modern languages. (For publication as a book.)

1140 Professor E. W. Hawkins *and* K. A. Emmans, Language Teaching Centre, University of York, Heslington, York YO1 5DD. *Associates:* Mrs. J. Lowe, P. S. Green and 2 consultants. *Sponsor:* Nuffield Foundation. *Enquiry into the language needs of employers in the United Kingdom, excluding the school system, the public services and local government.* Close co-ordination is being maintained with the Survey of curricula and performance (*see* no. 1161).

1151 F. S. Whitehead, Institute of Education, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN. *Associates:* F. C. Inglis, A. Wellings. *Sponsor:* Schools Council. *Research into the reading habits of children aged 10 to 15.* (Fuller description of the project available from Schools Council Information Centre.)

1154 M. Buckby, Schools Council Modern Languages Project: French Section, University of York, 86 Micklegate, York YO1 1JZ. *Associates:* Mrs. S. C. Honnor, 3 other linguists, 3 French authors and 4 artists. *Sponsor:* Schools Council. *Production of materials for the teaching of French in schools.* The aim is to produce audio-visual materials that can be used to teach French over a wide range of ability, particularly to pupils aged approximately 13-16 . . . Provisional title of 'core' materials: *A votre avis,* to be published by Arnold, Leeds. (Fuller description of the project available from Schools Council Information Centre.)

1160 Professor A. M. Ross, Department of Educational Research, University of Lancaster, Bailrigg, Lancaster. *Associates:* A. G. Razzell, E. H. Badcock and 2 other associates. *Sponsor:* Schools Council. *The middle years of schooling.* An investigation of the whole curriculum for children aged 8 to 13 . . . (Fuller description of the project available from Schools Council Information Centre.)

1161 C. V. James, Educational Development Building, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QN. *Associate:* Mrs. S. M. Rouve (University of London Institute of Education). *Sponsor:* Department of Education and Science *and* Scottish Education Department, through former Committee on Research and Development in Modern Languages. *National needs and demands in modern languages: survey of curricula and performance.* The survey aims to evolve a set of descriptors and classification categories for the unambiguous communication of the content and objectives of certain examination syllabuses . . . Close co-ordination is being maintained with the Enquiry into the language needs of employers (*see* no. 1140).

1267 R. J. E. Eunson, Department of Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, St. Thomas' Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU. *Associates:* Dr. M. R. Pearce, J. J. C. McCabe. *The teaching of French in a comprehensive school.* The aims are to investigate the feasibility of teaching French to 2 unstreamed classes of 11-year-old beginners, and to compare their performance with that of pupils of the same age in streamed classes in the same school.

1355 B. L. Jones, Homerton College, Cambridge CB2 2PH. *The use and scope of the multiple-choice test in the teaching of French by a direct method* . . . (a) primary and (b) secondary schools . . . Pupils of all abilities and at all levels have taken part in this investigation.

77

Select bibliography

This short list of books and articles relevant to the topic of the Conference includes some publications referred to in chapters 3, 4 and 6.

Burstall, Clare: *French from eight: a national experiment.* National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, 1968.

Burstall, Clare: *French in the primary school: attitudes and achievements.* National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, 1970.

Caddle, Grace: 'Teaching a modern language to classes of mixed ability'. Scottish Education Department, *National Steering Committee on Modern Languages Bulletin,* no. 1, March 1970, pp. 14-17.

Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research: *Teaching foreign languages to all pupils,* 3rd revised edition, CILT, May 1972. (Select List 14.)

Department of Education and Science: *Slow learners in secondary schools.* HMSO, 1971. (DES Education Survey 15.)

Howgego, J. 'Experiment in group teaching in modern languages'. Scottish Education Department, *National Steering Committee on Modern Languages Bulletin,* no. 3, January 1971, pp. 11-16.

Johnstone, Richard: 'Demanding the possible'. *The Times Educational Supplement,* 25 July 1972, p. 47.

Lanarkshire Association of Teachers of Modern Languages: 'The place of background knowledge of the foreign country in the modern language course'. Scottish Education Department, *National Steering Committee on Modern Languages Bulletin,* no. 3, January 1971, pp. 21-34.

Leeming, P. A.: 'The way ahead'. *Audio-Visual Language Journal,* vol. 9, no. 2, summer 1971, pp. 71-82.

Loughton, B.: 'Group work'. *Vorwärts: Nuffield/Schools Council introductory German course.* E. J. Arnold. Teacher's Book for Stage 2A, Appendix B, pp. 10-11.

Mayer, Frank C.: 'Reaching and teaching the less able student in foreign language classrooms'. *French Review,* vol. 43, no. 4, March 1970, pp. 624-9.

Parr, Betty: 'A modern language for the majority'. *Trends in Education,* 15 July 1969, pp. 30-4; also in *Audio-Visual Language Journal,* vol. 9, no. 1, spring 1971. pp. 7-12.

Partington, J. A.: 'Streams, sets or mixed ability groups'. *Modern Languages*, Vol. 50, no. 3, September 1969, pp. 117-20.

Pimsleur, Paul, and others: *Under-achievement in foreign-language learning.* (Final report.) US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, 1963.

Reynolds, R. F.: 'On teaching the "less able" child'. *Vida Hispánica*, vol. 18, no. 3, winter 1970, pp. 26-39.

Richards, Donald: 'Teaching German to the lower streams'. *Treffpunkt*, vol. 3, no. 2/3, 1971, pp. 11-25.

Rowlands, D. G., editor: *Group-work in foreign language teaching.* Nuffield Foundation Materials Development Unit, York, 1972.

Rushworth, F. D.: 'Modern languages in the comprehensive school'. *Aspects of Education*, no. 6, University of Hull Institute of Education, 1967, pp. 92-106.

Scottish Education Department: *Modern languages and the less able pupil: second report of the National Steering Committee for Modern Languages.* HMSO, Edinburgh, 1970.

Scottish Education Department: *The place and aims of modern language teaching in secondary schools: fourth report of the Scottish National Steering Committee for Modern Languages.* HMSO, Edinburgh, 1972.

Scottish Education Department: *Scottish Central Committee for Modern Languages Bulletin*, no. 6, May 1972.

Smith, D. G.: 'Foreign languages and the unstreamed situation'. *Audio-Visual Language Journal*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 61-6.

APPENDIX 5

Conference participants

Conference Chairman: Professor A. Spicer, *University of Essex*

A. J. Bennett, *Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research*
D. H. Board, *Metropolitan Regional Examinations Board*
Miss S. Browne, HMI, *Department of Education and Science*
J. Brothwell, *Dinnington High School, nr. Sheffield*
M. Buckby, *Schools Council Modern Languages Project*
L. R. Cole, *West Sussex Education Department*
Dr. J. A. Corbett, *Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research*
Mrs. E. L. Cryer, *Gordano School, Portishead, nr. Bristol*
Mrs. A. Childs, *Hightown Comprehensive School, Southampton*
W. Cunningham, HMI, *Scottish Education Department*
E. R. Ellard, *Hagley Park Comprehensive School, Rugeley, Staffs*
R. J. Eunson, *University of Newcastle upon Tyne*
Mademoiselle G. Fontier, *French Institute, London*
Miss D. L. Forrester, *Doncaster College of Education*
J. Gordon, *Brent Education Department*
Professor E. W. Hawkins, *University of York*
H. Hayes, *Scottish National Curriculum Development Centre for Modern Languages*
A. W. Hornsey, *Institute of Education, University of London*
P. H. Hoy, HMI, *Department of Education and Science*
Miss E. M. Hoyles, *Vauxhall Manor School, London*
C. V. James, *University of Sussex*
B. Jones, *Homerton College, Cambridge*
F. H. King, *Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research*
Miss H. N. Lunt, *Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research*
J. McNair, *University of Manchester*
Mrs. B. Mason, *University of Bath*
Dame Margaret Miles, *Mayfield School, London*
S. H. Miller, *West Bridgford Comprehensive School, Nottingham*
B. G. Palmer, *Berkshire College of Education*
Mrs. B. Parr, HMI, *Department of Education and Science*
F. L. Penty, *Beeston County Primary School, Leeds*
G. E. Perren, *Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research*
G. R. Potter, *West Sussex Education Department*
Mrs. S. Rouve, *Philippa Fawcett College of Education, London*
D. G. Rowlands, *Schools Council Modern Languages Project*

C. V. Russell, *Institute of Education, University of London*
M. V. Salter, HMI, *Schools Council*
Miss M. C. Scott, *Joint Council of Language Associations*
Mrs. J. Sharp, *Jordanhill College of Education, Glasgow*
D. Sidwell, *Wreake Valley College, Syston, Leics*
Mrs. S. M. Stoker, *Inner London Education Authority*
L. M. H. Timmermans, *Educational Publishers' Council*
J. V. Townshend, *Balls Park College of Education, Hertford*
G. Varnava, *Holland Park Comprehensive School, London*
Mrs. R. M. Wright, *Mayfield School, London*

Conference secretary: Miss R. White, *Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research*